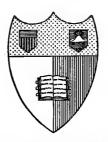


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THROUGH BRITISH GUIANA TO THE SUMMIT OF RORAIMA



KAIETUK FALL.

Frontispiece.

THROUGH BRITISH GUIANA TO THE SUMMIT OF RORAIMA

MRS. CECIL CLEMENTI, M.B.E.

WITH FOURTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS AND A MAP

E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY 681 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK

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THE DEMERARA RIVER

THROUGH BRITISH GUIANA TO THE SUMMIT OF RORAIMA

CHAPTER I

THE DEMERARA RIVER

Men travel far to see a city, but few seem curious about a river. Every river has, nevertheless, its individuality, its great silent interest. Every river has, moreover, its influence over the people who pass their lives within sight of its waters.—H. S. Merriman: The Sowers, chap. ii.

British Guiana, as first seen from the shoal-water near the Demerara lightship, is a mournful and monotonous picture. Mud flats, fringed with courida and mangrove, stretch endlessly along the shore. Never a hill is to be seen. The coastal flats are four feet below the level of high spring tides, and the Atlantic slops over the sea dams in yellow waves of muddy water. The wide expanses of rich sugar-fields and smiling rice lands begin about a mile from the seaside and stretch "aback" to the "wet savannahs," by means of which they are irrigated. These wet savannahs are vast natural swamps converted artificially into shallow lakes by "stopping off"

their seaward outlets. South of them spreads "the bush," that great primeval forest so hostile to man, but sheltering in its mysterious recesses a million varieties of insects, a multitude of beasts and reptiles, and a wealth of bird life unequalled, perhaps, in any other part of the world.

Little, however, does the average colonist or the chance visitor to British Guiana see of the wonder and beauty of South America. forest builds an impenetrable barrier, keeping him a close prisoner upon seaside mud flats, which are in the main a dreary waste of uncultivated land. Lack of labour renders it impossible for more than a small fraction even of the coastal fringe to be made to yield its increase. A land the size of England, Scotland, and Wales combined; a population equal to that of Hertfordshire, and a cultivated area less than one-fifth the size of Kent: a land for the greater part unknown and unsurveyed, whose only roads extend along the seaboard and for a few miles up the banks of its main rivers—such is British Guiana, ever since the close of the Napoleonic Wars a possession of the British Crown, the only one in South America, and rich in unexplored possibilities.

But the colonists of British Guiana have never

Monotony of Coast

made any serious attempt to investigate the interior of their heritage. Their revenue has always been spent upon coastal development; and a conviction exists that the interior is not only a death-trap, but also a wilderness of useless jungle and sandy deserts. Many attempts were made to dissuade me from venturing into it with my husband, and I was assured that I was risking my health—nay, my life. But the call of the wild was too strong, and I shall always be glad that I decided to go; for the fact that a woman has traversed these forests and the highland prairies beyond during many strenuous weeks and came back with health and vigour renewed may perhaps dispel the legends accumulated about the horrors of "the bush," and induce people to investigate for themselves the charms and opportunities of this neglected land, or at least to travel with us in spirit into those great expanses of sleeping Nature which await the day of man's occupation. British Guiana lies, like the princess of the fairy-tale, in an enchanted sleep. One day, surely, the fairy prince will come, mounted upon an iron horse, and bid her awake!

Two long years my husband and I lived con-

tinuously in Georgetown, at the mouth of the Demerara River. Then, exhausted in mind and body by the enervating atmosphere and dismal monotony of a tropical coast, near the equator and below sea-level, we decided to spend a brief holiday in exploring a part of the Colony's interior hitherto blank upon the map, hoping to find there some of that strength which cometh from the hills. A journey up cataract-barred rivers and through primeval forests by Indian trails was in itself an attractive prospect; but we had a still more potent lure. On the 21st March, 1914, my husband had spent a day at the Kaietuk Fall, and had gazed from the brink of the great chasm into which the Potaro River there plunges, up its dreamy reaches towards the forest-clad ridges that stand above the Arnik creek and away to the towering, cliff-faced mass of Mount Kowatipu. It was then that he resolved to visit. some day the wonders which Nature might hold in the forests and savannahs farther to the west and the south-west, and perhaps even to make his way to that famous Mount Roraima, of which the residents in British Guiana hear so much and see so little. Then, in October, 1915, he made the acquaintance of Mr. J. C. Menzies, whose

Lure of the Bush

occupation as a diamond and gold prospector had carried him into distant parts of our Colony's interior. Mr. Menzies' account of prairie tablelands at high altitudes, to be reached by travelling a few days beyond Kaietuk, and affording a view of Mount Roraima, where the boundaries of British Guiana, Brazil, and Venezuela meet, and whence streams flow to the Amazon, Orinoco, and Essequebo, determined us to attempt the journey across those tablelands to that mountain of mystery. During the previous seven years Mr. Menzies had frequently traversed the littleknown and unsurveyed part of the Colony that lies between the Potaro River and our frontier with Brazil, and he had been greatly struck by the opportunities for cattle-ranching afforded on its highland savannahs. He had, moreover, bought and driven cattle from Brazil over the Ireng River into British territory, where they wander freely under the nominal guardianship of a tribe of Makusi Indians. He was therefore well qualified to make the preliminary arrangements for the expedition which we had in mind, and he very kindly agreed to place his experience unreservedly at our disposal and to accompany His knowledge of our proposed route did

not extend beyond the Colony's boundaries; but he felt sure that an Indian guide could be found in one of the villages near the Ireng, who would be able to lead us on to the goal of our hopes, Mount Roraima.

We started on the 20th December, 1915, our first stage being by steamer from Georgetown to Wismar, a small settlement sixty miles up the Demerara River. The journey takes eight hours, and the scenery is not interesting. For the most part the land on both sides is absolutely flat and screened from the traveller by a dense fringe of jungle growth. Not that the riverbanks are entirely unoccupied; tenements and farms are dotted along each bank for miles after the tall chimneys of the sugar factories are left behind. Indeed, between Georgetown and Wismar there remains hardly an acre of Crown land by the river-side, and the titles of some estates date back to the year 1746, when the Dutch still ruled in Demerara. But a former Governor of the Colony decreed that a belt. several vards wide, should be reserved along the facade of all riverine grants, so that his successors might be free, if so disposed, to make roads or build wharfs on the river-bank. This un-

River-side Scenery

tenanted strip of land was, of course, rapidly overgrown with jungle, and the dense mokkamokka which grows at the water's edge makes a forbidding-looking fringe to the Demerara's vellow tide. This plant, a member of the arum family, is said to offer an excellent paper-making material. It grows sometimes just above the surface of the water, and sometimes reaches a height of thirty feet or so, forming a happy sanctuary for birds of many kinds. Their nests among the broad leaves, that clothe the thick stems rising straight out of the water, are secure from snakes and such-like enemies. Once I saw a tiny humming-bird, a veritable jewel of colour, seated on her minute nest, regarding us trustfully as we paddled by. This was not, indeed, on the banks of the Demerara, but during an expedition to one of the wet-savannah conservancies already mentioned. She sat on her airy throne, perched in the fork of a low mokkamokka stem, a few feet above the wind-swayed rushes and broad lily leaves which cover the wide expanses on each side of the water-paths, kept clear for boats. As we sat in our low corial, her background was blue sky, and a prettier sight can scarcely be imagined.

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The Demerara River has several large creeks, navigable by corials or even motor-boats for many miles, but their mouths, screened by mokkamokka plant, are mostly impossible to distinguish from the deck of a river steamer. The only one of these streams I have explored is the Kamuni creek, which my husband and I once visited in order to see the now almost deserted Chinese settlement of Hopetown. Strange that such lonely jungle should ever have had attractions for Chinese settlers! Everywhere broods the heavy silence of the tropical "bush," broken now and then by the whir of a beetle or the cry of a bird swooping across the creek; nor does this forest afford any variations of colour save in the intense green of the overarching foliage, reflected leaf for leaf in the still, black water. Now and then some glorious orchid decorates a decaying tree-trunk, or the blossoms of some brilliant flowering creeper. fallen from the distant tree-tops, float down the Here and there a splendid blue butterfly flits into the sunshine, and an occasional splash betrays an alligator subsiding into a dark pool.

The Hopetown Settlement, which was once a flourishing village engaged chiefly in charcoal-burning, now consists only of a few hovels,

Chinese Settlement

thatched with troolie palm, and of some ill-kept rice-fields, the one redeeming feature being a nice wooden church. When we went in, there were flowers on the altar, and a pair of Cantonese vases, which must wonder how they got there. An aged Chinese catechist conducted the service, and a priest visits the place at rare intervals.

The people, I remember, welcomed us gladly, and were delighted to hear a few words in Cantonese spoken by my husband. The whole village accompanied us as we walked along the dam, which serves it both as a main road and as a safeguard against inundation. We visited the "cultivation," but there was nothing satisfactory to be seen. A few miserable plantains, a few poor cacao-bushes, untended and uncared for, was all we could observe. A paddy-field, to which we were led, was merely a rough clearing in the bush, the trees having been cut down, but the stumps left standing, and no attempt was made There had been no manurto irrigate or drain. ing, nor, indeed, was there any sign of tillage. The sight was a sad one to eyes accustomed to the smiling, carefully tended rice-fields of China, with their neatly dammed divisions for conserving water, fields from which the laborious Cantonese,

by unceasing toil, reap their annual reward of two rice harvests and one crop of "dry cultivation." The Hopetown settlers told us that they could only raise a rice crop from a given area once in five years; but with care the land could, of course, be made productive. The settlement possessed no animals; not even the pig, so universal in China, was to be seen. In fact, the people evidently lacked energy to make an effort to improve their condition. Most young Chinese. desirous of better things, have doubtless discovered that by going to Georgetown they can with thrift, industry, and the business instincts of their race, find more promising openings for making a livelihood, in trade or otherwise, than Hopetown offers. Hence only the aged, the feeble, or the indolent, remain in the settlement; and Hopetown no longer answers to its name. for little hope of its future is now left.

The Chinese, however, came late in the story of the Demerara. Only Caribs lived there in 1598, when the river was first made known to Europe by the report of two Dutch ships that had cruised along the coast of Guiana, but had not traded in the "Demirara," because they were pressed for time, and because the Caribs

River-side Population

informed them that "not much was to be found there," and also, perhaps, chiefly "because their provisions were growing scant." In those days, maybe, there was a numerous Carib population hereabouts; but the inhabitants are now a curious medley, almost amphibious, for once the sugar estates are passed the river is their only road, and the smallest child navigates his corial. The census of 1911 records that only 8,101 people were in that year inhabiting the Demerara. Of these, 2,983 were blacks; 1,756 were East Indians; 1,741 were of mixed race; 124 were Chinese; 178 were Portuguese; and 48 were Europeans other than Portuguese. Only 1,229 say 15 per cent. of the whole—were aborigines. There is the history of British Guiana in a nutshell! A ceaseless struggle to people from overseas an empty land! The Portuguese came from Madeira. The blacks are descended from negro slaves brought here from Africa by the Dutch West India Company. No black slaves were ever brought to Demerara under British rule; for the slave trade was abolished by Parliament in 1807, and this Colony did not become definitely British until seven years later. The East Indians have all been introduced as inden-

tured labourers under a system of immigration which began in 1845 and ended in 1917. They hail chiefly from Bengal and Madras. The Chinese also came here under indenture, as the result of a scheme of immigration, from Hong-Kong, Canton, and Amoy, which lasted from 1853 intermittently until 1874, and was then discontinued.

On the whole, the Lower Demerara is distinctly monotonous and void of interest, but shortly below Wismar there are hints of better things. The river, which at Georgetown is a mile wide, narrows considerably; the banks rise on either side, crowned by big forest-trees, telling of their mighty brethren in the far interior, and greenheart logs lie steeping in the river, waiting to be shipped. They cannot be drifted downstream in the usual fashion, as greenheart is heavier than water and does not float.

Moreover, the river-water, previously an opaque yellow from the influx of the tides that wash seas of mud along the British Guiana coasts, now changes to the beautiful black "bushwater," which, coming from the forest depths, is darkly stained by vegetable matter held in suspension. Sometimes it has a reddish tinge, and

Demerara-Essequebo Railway

then again turns amber-coloured, especially over sandy shallows. It makes a wonderful mirror for sky, cloud, and tree, reflected in its sleeping depths; and it is quite safe and pleasant to drink, when boiled.

The township of Wismar on the Demerara River is the terminal point of the small piece of railway built in 1896 by Sprostons Limited to cross the divide, here less than nineteen miles wide, between the Demerara and Essequebo Rivers. Close to the railway-station, alongside which is a steamer wharf, cluster the policestation, post office, magistracy, and a few shops. The train is a little toy affair, very dirty; the engine burns wood fuel, and the sparks which fly from its funnel give as fine a display of fireworks after nightfall as one could wish to see. They are, however, somewhat dangerous. A case in point was the occasion when Princess Marie-Louise travelled over the line in 1914. The train had been specially decorated in her honour; but it had not proceeded more than half a mile from Wismar before the sparks set all the decorations on fire, and a halt was necessary in order to divest the passenger-coaches of all combustible embellishments.

Crossing the divide by motor-trolley is quite an agreeable experience, especially in the cool of the evening, and the line is seen to better advantage. The scenery, however, is disappointing. On the Essequebo side of the water-parting, Sprostons have considerable timber-cutting grants, to which they run branch lines. But near the main line all big trees have long ago been cut down, and some years ago a terrible forest fire swept down the divide, leaving behind it a desolation of stark and charred tree-trunks, unlovely to look at. The soil is a white sand, dazzling in the equatorial sunlight.

Just above Wismar the Demerara Bauxite Company has begun mining operations, and it is very interesting to visit the Company's settlements at Fair's Rust and Akyma. Fair's Rust is a mile above Wismar and can be reached by ocean-going steamers, but the principal bauxite mines, or rather quarries, are twelve miles farther up, where the low hills consist of almost solid pink-coloured ore, once the overburden has been removed. The Company pays great attention to the health of its employés: good houses are built; bush is cleared away, and drainage and sanitation carefully contrived.

THE DEMERARA RIVER: VIEW FROM THREE FRIENDS' MINE ACROSS TO AKYMA.

Demerara Bauxite Company

A very pleasant way of accomplishing the journey to Wismar is to travel as a guest of the Company in one of its comfortable motor-boats, starting from Georgetown at about tea-time and following the silvery pathway of the river, aglow in the setting sun; to anchor in the starlight and sleep in the grateful coolness and velvet silence of the river night; to get under way again in the dawn, and to reach the settlement at Akyma before the full heat of the day. Especially is this delightful when such a journey is but the first stage on towards all the glories of mountain and river which lie awaiting those who venture to explore the wonders of an unknown land.

THE ESSEQUEBO RIVER

CHAPTER II

THE ESSEQUEBO RIVER

Vainly does each, as he glides,
Fable and dream
Of the lands which the River of Time
Had left ere he woke on its breast,
Or shall reach when his eyes have been closed.
Only the tract where he sails
He wots of; only the thoughts,
Raised by the objects he passes, are his.

MATTHEW ARNOLD: The Future.

The problem of improving the Colony's lines of communication into the interior may be said to be the problem of circumventing the Essequebo River. For instance, it is the Essequebo and its tributary the Rupununi which ought to form a natural highway across British Guiana to Brazil. But the cattle-track, just opened to Georgetown from the Colony's lowland savannahs near the Brazilian border, studiously avoids the Essequebo, which it touches only at Kurupukari, there crossing the river and leaving it for good. Again, the Essequebo and its tributary the Cuyuni should form the main avenue of approach from British

Guiana to Ciudad Bolivar on the Orinoco, in the heart of Venezuela. But it is very likely that, when the time comes for linking this Colony to Venezuela by road or railway, the line will but touch the Essequebo to bridge its estuary, and then make across country to the Tumeremo savannahs. Similarly, the problem of reaching Kaietuk and the highland savannahs of British Guiana has now become the problem of avoiding the Essequebo.

It is a tantalizing river. Twelve miles wide at its mouth; two miles wide at Bartika, where the commingled Cuyuni and Mazaruni join it; and still fully the same width at Rockstone, where the Demerara-Essequebo Railway strikes it nevertheless, its innumerable cataracts and rapids make it a snare and an illusion to the navigator. In fact, the raison d'être of the Demerara-Essequebo Railway is to short-circuit the extremely dangerous series of cataracts between Rockstone and Bartika, in which many lives have been lost. By crossing the low divide between the two rivers. the traveller reaches the Essequebo at Rockstone, well above these dangers. He then has a navigable stretch of sixty miles before him to Tumutumari.





Watersmeet of commingled Cuyuni and Mazaruni Rivers with Essequebe.

To face page 31.

Where Three Rivers Meet

This short-circuit, however, misses some interesting country. At Bartika, thirty miles below Rockstone, the commingled Cuyuni and Mazaruni Rivers flow into the Essequebo, and very beautiful is the watersmeet of the three stately streams. On one hand, the shining waters of the Cuyuni invite one, as the morning mists roll away, to follow its gleaming track to Venezuela; whilst, on the other, Mazaruni, "black water," as its Indian name implies, though flecked with spume from its dread cataracts, has lured on many a diamond-seeker to the very shadow of Roraima's unscalable precipices.

Amid the mingling Mazaruni and Cuyuni, with a clear view down to the Essequebo, lies Kyk-over-all, a tiny island, where the earliest Dutch settlers lived in a fort, whose picturesque ruins still remain. These hardy pioneers established themselves here as early as the opening years of the seventeenth century, and traded with the Indians chiefly in anatto dye. To "see over all" was indeed a necessity for that tiny handful of white men, whose sole connection with Europe, civilization, and succour was but one solitary ship in a year! The Dutch also established a settlement at Kartabo, a bamboo-crowned point on the

nearest mainland, about half a mile away, whence a speedy flight to the fort could be made in case of danger descried. Kartabo Point lies exactly between Mazaruni and Cuyuni, and here the New York Zoological Society hopes to establish a permanent research station under Dr. William Beebe, who considers the neighbourhood a paradise from the naturalist's point of view.

Within sight, a few miles downstream, His Majesty's Penal Settlement affords to the convicts all that Nature can offer to cheer their toil! There is naturally no stone in the silted mud flat on which lies the inhabited part of British Guiana; but the excellent granite of which the hills near the Settlement are composed forms the quarry whence all the stone used on the coast has been obtained. Convict labour has also built a drydock adjacent to the prison.

I have never been beyond Kartabo on the Mazaruni, but I remember a delightful expedition up the Cuyuni to Matope. We started from the Penal Settlement in the delicious freshness of the early morning, and were carried by the big prison launch to the foot of the Camaria rapids, where there is a road-portage of three miles. "Jack" and "Jill," two panting Ford lorries,

The Camaria Road

conveyed us with many bumps and jerks over the uneven, hilly road. A prison gang was out "improving" the road-surface by shovelling loose sand into the ruts. Their work looked very nice, and certainly had not exhausted or overheated the dusky road-menders; but poor "Jack" and "Jill" found sand-filled ruts more than they could bear and constantly stuck fast, whilst their boiling radiators protested noisily with spurts of angry steam, and "all man" found assisting them out again distinctly more strenuous than road-mending. Next I have memories of a long, lazy afternoon, when, embarked once more, we puffed and panted slowly upstream from Camaria, or else drifted in lazy silence on the bosom of the big sleepy river, whilst our out-board motor refused to function. The delightful blue hills on each bank of the Cuyuni seemed shouldering each other aside to catch a glimpse of the unaccustomed life; and the exquisite peace made me wish "ever to seem falling asleep in a half-dream," until the diabolical spitting and puffing reasserted itself and restored me to reality again.

We managed to reach Matope before dusk in spite of many breakdowns. Here, amid tree-

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C

crowned rocks, the river swirls down in fifteen separate cataracts; and, in the days of Wenamu and Pigeon Island gold booms, Matope resthouse, post office, and bond-store were established on the two most accessible islets, and a launch service plied thither. We were joyously greeted by the black officer in charge of the station, who proudly displayed to us the attractions of his lonely little domain and ferried us in the gathering dusk—for twilight is, alas! unknown in the tropics—across to the rest-house island, a most enchanting spot. Here, after the bustle of disembarkation and the long, hot day, a bathe in the cool, soft river water, like cream to the skin, was delightful indeed, though it had to be accompanied by a furious splashing to frighten the pirai, an unpleasant flesh-eating fish that nips off the fingers and toes of the unwary ere they know it. Then, lulled by the musical roar of the cataracts, we slept soundly until, at 3 a.m., the "howling baboons" howled. To anyone who has never heard these creatures it is perhaps impossible to convey any idea of this marvellous sound. The South American baboons have howling bones in their throats, and at a distance of some miles their "howl" sounds merely like a storm-wind

A Deserted Garden

soughing through distant tree-tops; but, when they are close at hand, the whole air is alive with the din, so that you cannot tell from which direction it proceeds. Every nerve in your body tingles, and there is a curious fascination in the great volume of sound, which used to remind me dimly of the boom of the big temple-bell through the cryptomeria groves of far-distant Japan.

Near Matope, on a hill-shoulder on the right bank of the river, stand the ruins of the house in which the government gold officer of the district used to live in the days of the big gold rushes. He must have had a charming abode. We explored remains of a lovely garden terraced in the hill-side. Beautiful clumps of feathery bamboo framed delicious views of sky, river, and forest, adream in the golden sunlight; whilst bougainvillea, oleander, and petrea made the foreground a riot of colour. But Nature in tropical climates pursues her task of blotting out the works of man with surprising swiftness. The house, a wooden structure of the usual Creole type, had fallen to pieces inside under the influence of wood-ants. and its three stories were filled with a glorious alamander-bush, thrusting its golden blossoms

everywhere, filling all the deserted space, and forcing its way out over the roof.

Doubtless one day in the far-distant future these lovely reaches of river will be colonized. Plantations of limes, coffee, and rubber will replace the all-enveloping forests, and managers' houses will crown the little hills. Although so close to the equator, the sun in British Guiana has little of its eastern fierceness and the climate is wonderfully healthy, if elementary principles of hygiene and sanitation are observed. Once away from the mosquito-ridden coastal swamps. our experience has always been that we can expose and exert ourselves in a way that would be impossible in the East, and I believe that on these inviting hills white men, with wives and children, could live in health and comfort. Communications are needed: motor-roads to run through the forest connecting the settler with civilization and his neighbours. One pioneer, Mr. G. B. Withers, has cleared and planted with rubber the hills on the Mazaruni opposite the Penal Settlement, and has constructed a motorroad through the forest to connect his estate with the Agatash Lime Plantation on the Essequebo above Bartika. No metalling was necessary,

From Rockstone to Tumatumari

since the forest floor, once cleared of stumps, makes an admirable surface. All the big forest trees have been left standing, only the "underbush" being removed, for shade thus prevents the swift upspringing of vegetable growth which would occur in any place exposed to the direct rays of the tropical sun. Cool even at midday, with hats and helmets removed to enjoy the delicious shade, to drive along these cleverly-aligned gradients is a treat indeed; and one dreams of the transformation which might be wrought by motor transport in this unopened land.

But the day of motor-roads into the interior has not yet come, and we reached Rockstone on our journey to Roraima by railway from Wismar. At Rockstone the great width of the Essequebo is disguised, as almost everywhere else, by islands; for immediately opposite the railway terminus is Gluck Island, fully seven miles long, in whose marshy jungle the Victoria Regia lily was originally found. Apart from the railway-station, the only other building there is a pleasant little bungalow hotel, in which we spent the night. The full moon over the Essequebo was very pretty.

We started upstream from Rockstone at

6.30 a.m. on the 21st December, 1915, and arranged ourselves for a long day's occupation of the Ark, a primitive sort of house-boat, towed alongside the motor-launch which plies regularly, when the state of the river permits, between Rockstone and Tumatumari. The launch was a terribly noisy affair, and even in the dignified seclusion of our Ark we could not hear ourselves speak. However, once comfortably established in hammocks, we could lose ourselves in our books. One of the most important parts of an outfit for a bush journey, and certainly one that requires very careful thought, is the choice of one's library; for who would dream of starting, like Musset's Ninon, "en voyage sans livre"? You want, first of all, books that contain a good deal of reading matter in them, so that you may not run through the pages too quickly; and the more they afford of piquant contrast to the surroundings you are likely to encounter, the better; whilst an enduring charm will be thrown for you over any favourite work which has accompanied you across hill and dale and cheered hours of weary waiting in the rain, or of provoking delays on the part of the food commissariat. Sir George Trevelvan's Life and Letters of that most

Trials and Tribulations

delightful of men, Lord Macaulay, Macaulay's Essays, Kim and Vanity Fair, have all acquired for me a peculiar and indescribable flavour, since this or that passage recalls some incident of travel or lazy hammock hours in river and forest, when, as supper was a-preparing or the pit-pat of rain beat on our tent-roof, I lay luxuriating in the delightfulness of freshly-donned, dry footgear and in the anticipation of "pigtail soup."

The Essequebo was unusually low on this occasion, and the silver sand-reefs jutted out of the water like bones. At midday we were stopped by the Kopano sands, which forbade further progress. Here we waited a long three hours for a smaller launch, the Nelly, which was expected downstream from Tumatumari to discharge her crowd of "balata-bleeders" and "porkknockers" into our bigger launch for their return journey via Rockstone to the joys of a Christmas in civilization. We found the time long, in spite of lunch, Lord Macaulay, and the view of a flattopped hill known as the Arosaro Mountain, a welcome sight to eyes that had scarcely seen any rising ground for two years. It is a low forestclad hill with a flat top and cliff-edges, the first sounding of the Roraima leit-motif. We were,

however, anxious to reach Tumatumari that night, for we knew that the Ark must be left behind with the big launch, while the tarpaulins and camp gear, that would have made a bivouac on the river-bank tolerable, had preceded us by some days with our stores. At 3 p.m. we welcomed the sight of a puff of dark smoke on the wide stretch of smooth, still water before us; but it was close on 4 p.m. before our transhipment was complete and our fate committed to the launch Nelly. She was quite unspeakable—filthy dirty, with a shocking vibration—but we were thankful enough when she did vibrate, for the hateful little thing constantly broke down and floated helplessly on the vast expanse of desolate water, as we anxiously scanned the lingering daylight, the while an unhappy son of Ham wrestled in vain with his engine. My husband managed to sling a hammock for me inside the launch, and that was a great comfort; but the noise was excruciating. The coxswain, a nice fellow called Lekha, half East Indian and half black, said his orders were to get us through, if possible, but that Crabbu Falls could not be run in the dark. As he spoke, the vixenish launch broke down again, and required half an hour's patching up.

Rapids by Moonlight

A little later the engines stopped once more for a quarter of an hour. We felt rather miserable, as a more comfortless place in which to spend the night than that abominable little Nelly could hardly be imagined, and no food was available, save tea and the remains of a cake, with some slabs of chocolate which I fortunately had handy; so we were now pretty hungry. By 6.30 p.m. it was dark. Rich, fresh, sweet scents were wafted to us from the banks; but, though the moon rose beautifully at 7 p.m., she hid her fickle light soon afterwards behind a cloud-bank. However, our cox was a real good fellow. By help of a very feeble light from the dimmed moon, he got us safely through Tigri Rapids—a tortuous race between rocks—and at about 8.30 p.m. we got to the foot of Crabbu Falls. Here another launch, the Potaro, was waiting to help us up the rapid, and the blazing crude oil of her engines made the night a weird inferno of noise and glare. She was lying near a sandy spit; and, when Nelly got alongside her, we managed to push out a plank, scrambled ashore, and strolled about to stretch our cramped limbs. There was a banaboo of Patamona Indians near by, whose inhabitants came out silently to watch at a safe distance our

strange proceedings. The flickering light of the burning oil lit up their dusky figures uncannily.

At length the moon, which was full, cleared somewhat, and Lekha decided to risk the attempt of climbing the rapid. Nelly and Potaro were lashed side by side and, steaming together, were to surmount the rapid. But the first attempt failed. We steamed up, gaining ground inch by inch, till, just as we were at the crest of the rapid, Nelly's engines stopped again, and we had to slide back. Next time, however, Potaro made the attempt towing Nelly as dead-weight, and just did it. Lekha then said that Potaro drew too much water to continue safely upstream, as she might hit on a sand-bank. But I declared that I would prefer any fate to that of returning to Nelly; and Lekha, who was really a sportsman, agreed to transfer our few belongings to the bigger launch and take us on. Two miles above Crabbu Falls we entered the mouth of the Potaro River, and puffed our hesitating way over its black course, the moon having disappeared again as soon as she had seen us safely surmount the rapid. Darkness, of course, hid from us the lovely view of blue mountain ranges, which we have subsequently seen from Potaro mouth, hills

A More Excellent Way

which verily looked to us the "delectable mountains." We reached Tumatumari, ten miles up the Potaro, shortly before midnight, as tired as dinnerless folk well could be; but that was the only really unpleasant day of all our forty days in the wilderness.

Such an experience naturally prompts the question: Is there no better way of getting from Georgetown to the Potaro? Cannot this section also of the Essequebo be circumvented? Yes, a better way has been found, but it has not yet been made available for public use. There already exist eighteen and a half miles of railway from Vreed-en-hoop, on the Demerara River, opposite Georgetown, to Parika, on the Essequebo estuary. There also exists a much-neglected road, 67 miles long, built years ago by prison labour, from Bartika to the Kaburi gold-fields. It is now proposed to extend the railway for a distance of some thirty-four miles from Parika to a point opposite Bartika; and the trace has also been cut of a road extension from Kaburi to a place known as Garraway's Landing, on the Potaro. The total distance from Bartika to Garraway's Landing would be about a hundred miles; and, if this route were made available for

motor traffic, it would be possible with suitable arrangements to make the journey by train from Georgetown to Bartika and onwards by motor-car from Bartika to the Potaro River in a single day between sunrise and sunset. Such a line of communication would be a boon to the colonists both at Bartika and on the Potaro River, besides being a great step towards bringing the Kaietuk plateau within reach; and I hope the day may not be far distant when its construction will be taken in hand.

THE POTARO DISTRICT

CHAPTER III

THE POTARO DISTRICT

Quid non mortalia pectora cogis, Auri sacra fames?

Virgil: Æneid, iii. 56.

TUMATUMARI is a formidable cataract with rocky islands amidst its swirling rush of waters. name is said to mean "as hot as pepper." All river traffic, whether upstream or downstream, is stopped by this obstacle, and a portage between the lower and the upper landing must be made over about half a mile of good cart-road. right bank stands a nice wooden bungalow. belonging to Sprostons, built on a bluff overlooking the river. There are also several other houses, including a land office, a police-station and a post office, in this little outpost; and many "bucks," as the aborigines are called in local parlance, live in the neighbourhood. From a point just above the cataract Sprostons run a launch service for another ten miles upstream past Garraway's Landing to a place known as Potaro Landing,

The Potaro District

and there all public service ends. Potaro Landing is the northern terminus of a cart-road, about twenty-three miles long, running between the Potaro and Konawaruk Rivers and serving the Minnehaha Gold Mining Company's settlement. It runs as a sort of Nile through a desert of dense forest.

Great is the energy of the white man! In lands where all Nature cries to him, "Be still; do not exert yourself; keep a dry skin!" and where she relentlessly obliterates with importunate veils of quick-springing jungle all traces of his efforts, if ever he suspends them, he nevertheless pursues his way, dragging his machinery, and defying the mosquito! But in British Guiana he is hopelessly handicapped by want of labour. What can he do, if he cannot command the hands effectually to conquer the wilderness, to roll back the jungle, to plant and tend and reap?

The road up from the riverside at Potaro Landing is wide, but excessively bad. It begins by climbing up a hill of loose sand, in which the heated wayfarer toils along ankle-deep, save where a very rough corduroy of timber changes the form of his penance. Even the fortunate occupant of a dogcart is little better off, for the

The Potaro-Konawaruk Road

jarring to one's spine as the wheels jolt from log to log is almost more than body and bones can endure. After the first seven miles the road-surface changes and becomes ironstone gravel, good enough to permit motor traffic, provided one does not set too much store by the springs of the car. From the road there are interesting glimpses of the black cliffs of Eagle Mountain and another range of grim precipices, frowning like prison walls on either hand. The valley, thus shut in, is intensely hot. The soil is fertile, and limes especially thrive, though all cultivation is precarious, when established on an oasis, amid the jungle, and thus woefully exposed to the depredations of birds and cushie ants. These ants frequently clear a patch of cultivation in a single night of every blade of greenstuff.

When, in 1917, we visited the hospitable manager of the Minnehaha Company at his house, situated near the tenth milestone of the road, there was a big dredge at work washing gold in Mahdia creek at "Nine Miles," and another was in process of being shifted from "Fifteen Miles" to a point lower down the Minnehaha creek, near the twentieth mile-post. The Company also maintains a comfortable and picturesque bunga-

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low at "Eighteen Miles." Near the fifteenth mile you cross the divide between the Potaro and Konawaruk Rivers, and the road then runs along the banks of the Minnehaha creek. This once was a picturesque stream, but the washing for gold has discoloured it and altered its course. A track branches off from "Fifteen Miles" and runs up into the Eagle Mountain, where quartzmining operations had just been begun when war broke out and work was unavoidably suspended.

The administrative headquarters of the district are at the eleventh mile, where the Government maintains a court-house, a police-station, and a dispensary. Several shops are dotted at intervals along the road, and more than one church. Nor must I omit to mention the "Potaro Library," an imposing-looking shed consisting of side-posts, a roof, and a floor, and proclaiming its title in large letters, but (apart from the total absence of all books) a somewhat strange building to enjoy the title of "library." I understand it is frequently used for dancing. The shopkeepers of the Potaro Road and, I believe, in all the Colony's gold districts are Chinese. I shut my eyes and imagined the difference that would be wrought in that desolate scene if a million or so

Gold-dredging in Minnehaha Creek

of their almond-eyed brethren could be transported hither. How would the wilderness blossom as a rose, air and light enter, where reigns mosquito-breeding jungle, and the fertile land smile with all that maketh glad the heart of man! Now, if you bump over the excruciating corduroy and the large stones embedded in the road, and especially if light is fading and darkness gathering, the melancholy of the long, dreary, winding way, with its scattered settlements and struggling clearings, penetrates your very bones and gives you a sensation of physical disquiet.

I have, nevertheless, very pleasant recollections of the Potaro District and of the cheery hospitality of the Company's manager and his three or four white assistants, chiefly New Zealanders. Their pluck, good spirits, and eagerness in their work made a vivid impression on my mind, as did the interesting process of gold-washing, which we observed on Mahdia creek. The dredge-buckets bring up quantities of yellow mud from the bed of the stream, and this mud is washed by water along a sort of wide gutter with gratings across the bottom. The gold-bearing matter, being heavier than the rest, gravitates down through the gratings on to coconut matting

The Potaro District

sprinkled with quicksilver. This process is called "washing up." When it has continued for a considerable time, the coconut mattings are carefully washed and beaten, and all that comes out, including the quicksilver, which has charged itself with the gold particles, is again washed through a box by a jet of water. The box has three layers of plush in it, and the water is strained through these layers. The residue is very fine black dust, from which the gold-bearing quicksilver is carefully separated and carried off to be smelted. This process is called "streaming down."

From the manager's bungalow at the tenth mile a very pleasant alternative route back to Tumatumari, avoiding the launch trip, is to ride over the seventeen miles of Tiger creek trail. This trail was opened as a bridle track for the accommodation of the "pork-knockers," who washed Tiger creek for gold, at one time very profitably, though the "placers" are now worked out. A branch line, also made up as a bridle track, goes off from this trail to St. Mary's, on the Konawaruk River, where the British Guiana Gold Mining Company have dredges at work. The ride is delightful, if one be mounted on a sure-footed mule. The forest trees are veritable giants, and their deep

Tiger Creek Trail

shadow prevents the suffocating undergrowth from springing up. The line, when we rode over it, was clean, and all bridges were in good repair. It is absolutely cool even at midday in the exquisite shade, and we enjoyed charming little views, where the path wound pleasantly up and down small hills. At times it runs beside the deep pools of beautiful Tiger creek and its picturesque slides of amber water and creamy foam. Being mounted, we had the pleasure, rare to travellers in the bush, of looking about us instead of being obliged to watch our feet carefully all the time, or pay the penalty by a stumble. Thus I caught sight of an ant-bear, and we observed that remarkable animal, with its enormous tail and long snout, ambling along on the hill-side below us for quite fifty yards. It appears that ant-bears are bold creatures and fear nothing, as everything else takes care to give them a wide berth. Though they only eat ants, they have a way of rising on their hind legs, gripping an adversary with their inturned front claws, and then tearing him open with their hinder ones. Big ant-bears have been known to do this to men.

When the time comes to improve communications in this part of the Colony, the Potaro

The Potaro District

River will doubtless be bridged at Garraway's Landing, where it is only 300 feet wide. Then a line will be cut to join the Potaro-Konawaruk Road at "Two Miles"; and from this second mile-post another road will branch off to rejoin the river and climb to Kaietuk and the highland country beyond, up the wonderful Potaro Gorge.

To-day a trail leads away into the forest westwards from "Two Miles," where a rough signboard proudly points the way "To Kaieteur."* Gladly does the wayfarer step into the restful shade after the glare of white sand on the cartroad, and grateful indeed is the cool springiness of the leaf-strewn forest floor. After five miles along this trail, where from time to time the roar of unseen cataracts breaks the silence, the path emerges on Potaro bank once more, at a place known as Kangaruma. Here, on a low hill immediately above the river, is a small clearing with a wooden rest-house, belonging to Sprostons, a couple of Indian troolie-sheds, and some provision-fields.

It is on account of the long series of rapids below Kangaruma that the portage of seven miles from Potaro Landing has to be made, and the

^{*} Kaieteur is a mistake for Kaietuk. See p. 75.

Through Forest to Kangaruma

river's big loop to the north is also thus circumvented.

When travelling up the Potaro Gorge we have always sent our stores on ahead of us to Kangaruma, and arranged for our Indian carriers, or droghers, to await us there. Then from this spot one fairly "pulls out on the Long Trail, the trail that is always new."

THE POTARO GORGE

CHAPTER IV

THE POTARO GORGE

He lured her away so far,
Past so many a wood and valley and hill,
That now, would you know where they are?
In a bark on a silver stream,
As fair as you see in a dream.

A. O'SHAUGHNESSY: Zuleika.

Once the stores are all safely packed in the tentboat, the paddlers established on their thwarts, and after the last wild rush up the bank to secure some precious, almost forgotten article, such as kettle or saucepan, how delightful it is to feel that at length one is off into the very heart of the wilderness! The soothing splash of the paddles is inexpressibly welcome after the din of launch travel, and we surrender ourselves to the enjoyment of the big restful silence and unchanging peace of the dreamy forest-wrapped river, and to delightful anticipation of wonders to come.

On the journey to Roraima, we left Kangaruma in the afternoon of 22nd December, 1915. Our party consisted, besides Mr. Menzies and

The Potaro Gorge

ourselves, of Haywood, our black cook, a most excellent and capable fellow, and of fourteen aborigines. Scanning the expressionless bronze figures of these Indians as they paddled steadily upstream, I speculated on what manner of men they might be, these dwellers amid trees and waters, whose home lies in the very bosom of Nature, and who look to her alone to supply all their needs. Nine of them came from the Demerara River, and the remaining five were Makusis from the highlands whither we were bound. Two of these five—Johnny and Thomas by name—were headmen of Puwa, a village near the Ireng River and close to the Brazilian frontier. The Makusis were good fellows and did yeomen service; but the natives of the Demerara River. as we discovered to our cost, were an idle and worthless set. They had already suffered the contaminating effects of civilization, and great were the delays and annoyance we had to endure from them, until we were able to exchange them for the willing and athletic Makusis of the highlands.

Above Kangaruma stretch some seventeen miles of smooth water to Amatuk, where once more the roar and rush of a cataract break on

The Gateway to the Gorge

the river's repose. Amatuk is a delightfully pretty place. The Potaro here is joined by the Amuk creek, and then rushes in two cataracts round a rocky tree-crowned island, swirling out, all foam-beflecked, into a bay below. In the centre of the right-hand cataract, down which the great bulk of the water flows, there is a sheer drop of some thirty feet, and a fountain of white foam leaps upward. On a low knoll, looking over the bay and immediately above the left-hand cataract, stands another wooden rest-house. This knoll has been cleared of the dense bush, which dominates all else, and delicious English bracken grows freely on its sandy slopes.

We arrived by starlight; and, whilst the baggage was being carried up to the rest-house and supper made ready, I lay in my hammock watching an exquisite moon rising from out the million tree-tops of the forest, with a foreground of dimly shining river. The music of falling water filled the air, and the stars gleamed like great lamps hung athwart the night. Wherever we may in future travel, a hammock shall always accompany me. It enables one to be made as comfortable as possible in two minutes, though for sleeping at nights we must confess to being

The Potaro Gorge

luxurious enough to require camp-beds. To our delight, we each of us needed a warm blanket that night; and, when you have scarcely used the lightest blanket for two years, it is a real luxury to enjoy a good heavy one again. Rain fell all night long, and at dawn heavy mist-wreaths lay about the hills.

Amatuk is the gateway to the beautiful Kaietuk Gorge. Looking upstream from the bay below the fall, we saw towering on one side the peak of Kenaima Mountain, and on the other side the vertical cliff-face of Mount Kukui. Just above Amatuk the Potaro emerges from between these mountains, and is at once joined from the right by the Amuk creek, which also flows in a narrow gorge, so blocked by huge boulders and so difficult of access that it has never yet been explored. Streams, which are almost better spoken of as cascades, spring down the faces of the cliffs, gleaming like white threads against the red sandstone. Another hint is thus given of the Roraima leit-motif which rules the land. We had, indeed, throughout our wanderings the impression of a mighty symphony. The wondrous Kaietuk Fall was the first movement whose introduction began with Amatuk. Thereafter we



MOUNT SAKWAI ON POTARO RIVER NEAR TUKEIT.



WATERSMEET OF POTARO AND AMUK RIVERS AT AMATUK, SHOWING MOUNT KENAIMA ON RIGHT AND MOUNT KUKUI IN CENTRE ABOVE RIVER-MIST.

Diamond Prospecting

realized that several days of river and forest journey were but the transition passages to a movement of shining tablelands, whose jasper-bedded rivers repeat everywhere the same *leit-motif*, though with a myriad tiny variations, for all the streams of the highland savannahs tumble in cascades down vertical faces into a succession of pools, while long-sought-for and much-dreamt-of Roraima, with his cliffs over a thousand feet in height rising out of primeval forest, standing on his pedestal of rolling savannah uplands, with waterfalls leaping from his mysterious flat-topped summit, forms a magnificent résumé and finale of the whole.

Next morning, whilst the stores and baggage were being portaged from the bay below Amatuk to another boat moored above the falls, we had leisure to study the beauty of the cataract. The river was low, so we made our way to the edge of the water over rocks generally covered by the rushing stream as it changes from the normal dark—almost black—flow of its peaceful progress to the amber swirl and creamy spray of coming excitement. These diabase rocks are all flat-topped and deeply fissured, and they contain here and there curious "jigs," made by pebbles

The Potaro Gorge

swept round and round in some tiny whirlpool, till, as the long ages pass, they dig for themselves deep circular holes. These "jigs" are eagerly explored by the diamond prospectors, as sometimes they contain precious stones. I baled out one such deep, dark hole with the help of a Makusi, and obtained a plateful of extremely pretty pebbles, all tiny and agleam with many different colours, rose-red, turquoise-blue, pieces of malachite-green, and many a shining speck of quartz to raise my hopes. I felt that to be the actual winner of a real diamond, however small, would be a delightful experience; but my pebbles, although pronounced by the authority of Mr. Menzies and Haywood to be "good diamond indication," did not, in spite of their intrinsic beauty, harbour any stray speck of real value. Nevertheless, I feel that diamonds will always have an added charm for me when I think of them as gifts from that lovely land of unknown streams and as the ornaments of Nature herself.

We spent a delightful three hours paddling upstream to the next portage at Waratuk, surrounded by the wonderful scenery of the gorge. Rain fell in little misty veils of shower; and exquisite forest fragrance, wafted to us from the

Portage at Waratuk

banks, was strong enough to overpower even the smell of salt beef and pork which emanated from our provisions. Potaro here flows between flattopped cliffs towering on both sides about a thousand feet above their own reflections, mirrored in the black water. The hidden bases of the hills are clothed in forest, while their sides are grim precipices, revealing overhangs of castellated rock and toppling crags with great fissures and clefts, wild and wondrous to behold.

At about noon we reached Waratuk, where another portage is necessary. This is a much smaller cataract than Amatuk. In fact, at high river, boats going downstream can run it, whereas no one would dream of running Amatuk, in the centre of which is a vertical drop. On the right bank at Waratuk stands a little shelter with corrugated iron roof, supported by wallaba posts. Under its cover we lunched, or rather took "breakfast," as the midday meal is invariably called in this Colony; and at 2 p.m., when all our stores had been portaged, we set off again in another smaller craft known as the "parson's boat," used by the Church of England for the missionaries who at one time travelled up the Potaro to mission-stations, now abandoned.

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The Potaro Gorge

From Waratuk to Tukeit was two hours' paddling. The shining lazy river, lying half asleep between its sentinel hills, seemed already to have forgotten the wild leap over Kaietuk. But from our boat we caught several glimpses of the Kaietuk cliff, which bars the end of the gorge, and we could just see that corner of the fall itself which is nearest the left bank.

The river is studded by rocky islets, and the stunted trees growing thereon are often literally laden with long bags of woven sticks which are the mocking-birds' nests. At high river I once counted seventeen on one small tree, which appeared to rise straight out of the water, its rock pedestal being entirely submerged.

Above Tukeit the river is a series of racing cataracts, curiously broken by deep, still pools, where the main current would appear to flow beneath the surface. It is, of course, an entirely unnavigable piece of water, and to pursue the valley on foot to the base of the mighty Kaietuk precipice is an enterprise of extreme difficulty, not to say danger. Masses of giant boulders make progress all but impossible; and, save at very low river, the attempt could not be made. The Potaro has therefore to be abandoned until

Tukeit Cataract

some miles above Kaietuk, and no full view of the waterfall from below is obtainable along the present line of ascent.

Sprostons have made a little clearing at Tukeit, and have put up a wooden rest-house on the left bank of the river, about a hundred yards from the water. The forest closes in densely all round, so that the place has no view, and besides being very stuffy, it is full of big biting cow-flies. It is not a pleasant spot to spend a night in; but nevertheless, when encumbered by baggage, one cannot with the existing means of transport get up from Amatuk on to the Kaietuk plateau in one day. On the opposite side of the river, however, there is an excellent camping-ground on a beach of shining silver sand, and a rocky dell at the forest edge, watered by the clear, cold Tukeit stream dropping from the cliff-tops a thousand feet above, offers delightful refuge in the heat of the day. So, if time were no object, a camp on Tukeit sands for fishing would be an agreeable interlude in a "bush" journey. The very deep, still pools of the river near by are a favourite haunt of haimara, which are excellent eating. These fish sometimes grow very large. and Indians wading in the pools are on occasion

The Potaro Gorge

savagely bitten by them. The aborigines usually obtain fish by shooting them with bow and arrow. This they do with much skill and dexterity.

But who would delay at Tukeit when Kaietuk calls? We must be up and on!

KAIETUK, MOTHER OF MISTS

CHAPTER V

KAIETUK, MOTHER OF MISTS

The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep.

W. Wordsworth: Ode.

THERE were showers at dawn, but these had passed over when we started from Tukeit in the early morning to climb up on to the Kaietuk The existing forest trail, after leaving Tukeit, traverses some low foot-hills, and then rises sharply to cross the Washibaru creek. Next follows another steep ascent to the Korumê creek, which is bridged by tacoubas at a point whose Indian name has been translated as the "Devil's Mother's Pillars." Here the country is very broken, and the whole channel of the Korumê has been strewn with large boulders that completely hide the water from sight. It would seem probable that in time past cliffs stood on both sides of this gorge, and that they crumbled inwards, so blocking the exit of the Korumê, which, nevertheless, has burrowed a way underneath the rocks and hurries down in a very abrupt

cataract to the Potaro. From the Devil's Mother's Pillars there is an exceedingly steep climb, with a gradient resembling in places a ladder rather than a road, until the edge of the Kaietuk plateau is reached at a tree on which the word "Amen" has been cut. Gossip has it that on one occasion a respected colonist was hoisted up to this point, two Indians pulling him with a rope in front and two more pushing him behind. He lay down under this tree almost at his last gasp; and, while he recovered breath, his companion cut the word "Amen" in the trunk. It certainly is a villainous climb, especially in rainy weather, when the moss-covered steppingstones are wet and slippery, and it does not improve with acquaintance. From Amen Point the forest trail runs along a ridge more or less level for another couple of miles or so to the Kaietuk savannah, with the precipitous gorge of the Potaro on one side and the deep-cut valley of the Korumê on the other. The Indians say that this path originated in a track by which otters descended from the Upper to the Lower Potaro; and, whether this be so or not, the line is certainly quite unsuitable for human traffic even on foot.

The Kaietuk Savannah

The whole trail runs always in forest, never affording any view of the Kaietuk Falls or of anything save the vista of tree-trunks immediately ahead. Big boulders lie scattered pell-mell round about in the jungle, some as large as houses, and many curious orchidaceous plants thrive in the drenchingly moist atmosphere. The so-called "Kaieteur lily," whose green leaves are striped with brown and black lines and whose heart, when in flower, is a scarlet feather, grows gaily on boulder and tree-stem. Then suddenly, when we had been about two hours on the march from Tukeit, the forest ended and the trail debouched on a savannah of flat rock, covered with a thin layer of sand, in which grass and many charming wild-flowers grow freely. No sooner do you reach the savannah than you also come upon the last of Sprostons' rest-houses. It stands out in the open, at a considerable distance from any water, save what is caught upon its corrugated iron roof and conveyed to a vat. Behind it and on both sides all view is cut off by the forest. which is only a few feet away. In front there is a small open savannah, and beyond range upon range of blue, forest-clad hills. But there is still no sign or sound whatever of the mighty

waterfall, and those who do not know could never guess that anything extraordinary was near by.

We rested for a few minutes in the bungalow, enjoying the view and the delicious change of climate which comes from ascending some 1,500 feet. Then we walked on a hundred yards or so across the savannah. The first sign of danger ahead is a deep fissure in the ground, which must be crossed carefully. A few steps more, and with appalling suddenness a terrific chasm yawns at one's feet. From the rest-house nothing can be seen of precipice or chasm, and the forests which clothe the cliff-tops upon the opposite side of the river gorge appear to meet the edge of the savannah. Indeed, this abrupt rift in a landscape which does not otherwise suggest anything stupendous startled me afresh each time. takes hours to realize the scene. We stood on the overhanging lip of a precipice: thin air below us for many hundred feet. Still, however, the waterfall was almost a mile away across the gulf; and nothing could be seen of it, for the whole gorge was filled with mist and thick, white, fleecy cloud. "Mother of Mists" should Kaietuk be named, as Roraima is called "Father of Streams." In point of fact, however, the word

"Old Man's Rock"

Kaietuk (Dr. Bovallius writes it Kaijituik) means "Old Man's Rock," and the falls are so named by the Indians, because of a folk-tale to the effect that an aged Indian, becoming a nuisance to his relatives, as his feet were infested with chigoes, which they had to pick out for him, was put in a woodskin and sent to drift to his death over this abyss. Strange that Kaietuk's majestic beauty should have inspired no better legend than this! The word tuk or tuik means "rock," and is also found in Pakatuk, Amatuk, Waratuk, and Tukeit, all of which are well-known cataracts on the Potaro River. The usual spelling "Kaieteur" is a mere mistake.

The mists of the waterfall are drawn up and dispersed in the sunshine, but directly the sun goes they fill up the gorge and hide everything. Indeed, it was not till the afternoon on the day of our arrival that the weather cleared and Kaietuk stood revealed in all its grandeur. I fear it is almost impossible to give in words any idea of this wonder, but I will make an attempt. Lazy, dreamy Potaro suddenly leaps down fully eight hundred feet vertically into a great black caldron below, and then flows through a vast amphitheatre of precipices, towering to an equal height

on either bank, their bases clothed in forest. The black bush-water, as it reaches the lip of the fall and the sun strikes it, turns first amber and then to a creamy spray, and falls in festoons of foam, which seem living and change incessantly. The river was low on this occasion, so that comparatively little water was going over, and it looked as though the whole mass turned to spray before reaching the black depths beneath; but sometimes a puff of wind blew the opalescent foamcurtain aside for a second, and one caught a glimpse of the amber column descending. contrast between the grim, black and red, weather-stained cliffs and the flying, gleaming, living, falling water is marvellously beautiful. Little wisps of mist float ceaselessly forth from out the black cavern behind the fall. A glorious rainbow hovers about it, whilst flights of swallows cross and recross before it, bathing themselves in the spray in a manner that would enchant a Japanese artist. Pairs of macaws sail majestically past the background of white foam, the crimson of their under-wings and the brilliant blue of their bodies gleaming like jewels when the sun catches them. The fickle come-and-go of shape and sheen in the restless cataract makes

A Marvel of Beauty

its strange beauties alive with caprice and mystery; for the eye can follow during several seconds the lace-like, ever-varying tracery of each water-wreath as it drops from the lip of Kaietuk to meet the foam tossed up from the black whirl-pool underneath.

We spent all the afternoon studying the fall from various points of view. At the cliff-edge near Sprostons' bungalow one can see, but not photograph, its entire length; and there is a good view of the tumbling reaches of the river below, which alternate with large, still pools. You can also look fully a mile upstream above the fall, where Potaro flows in a straight reach through a vast, densely forested plateau, stretching away to distant blue hills, also forest-clad, save on their vertical cliff-sides—hills that beckon the traveller onwards, prophesying further wonders. For from the Kaietuk savannah a view can be obtained of Mount Kowatipu, round the spur of which we were to travel on our further journey to Roraima, and of the lofty range of mountains, called by the Indians Kamana and Morakabang, at the head of the Kopinang River. There is also an extensive panorama of the plateau and the mountains on the right bank of the Potaro.

Sir Walter Egerton, who visited Kaietuk in 1913, had a path cut for him from Sprostons' resthouse in a downriver direction, near the edge of the precipice, through an awesome forest among black fissures, huge rocks, and forbidding caverns, for a distance of about a quarter of a mile, to a bare jut of cliff, which overhangs the gorge at a point about one mile as the crow flies from the brink of Kaietuk. From this spot it is possible to photograph the abyss in its entire height, but not from any point nearer. The vertical fall is sixfold that of Niagara, and the whole scene is on so enormous a scale that it is difficult to realize how huge is every detail of it all, and one sorely needs something to give the sense of proportion with the ordinary workaday world. There is also a trail from the rest-house to the brink of the fall, where one obtains a wonderful view down the gorge to Mount Kenaima at the Amatuk Gateway and to the dim plains beyond, a distant sea of forest. But from the water's edge it is, of course, impossible to see much of the chasm into which the river falls, unless you lie prone on the overhanging rock and look straight down into the caldron below. Round about the head of the fall on the left bank of the Potaro is a curious



Potaro Gorge from Kaietuk.

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A Memorable Christmas

open plain of hard, smooth rock. It is almost flat, with a gentle incline toward the river-side, and is strewn with small, round, white pebbles. Save the wealth of wild-flowers, only scrub wreathed with golden "Kaietuk vine" and big orchidaceous plants, some of them ten or twelve feet high, grow there; but it is a curiously fascinating place, and forms a weird and fantastic approach to the fall itself. Surely it would be a good thing if British Guiana made the whole of this unique savannah in the immediate vicinity of Kaietuk, abounding, as it does, in interesting plants and flowers, into a colonial park, after the model of the national parks in the United States; and, if so, when made readily accessible, it should be a source of health and delight to many generations of our colonists, whose work compels them to reside, as a rule, on the hot coastal plains.

We reached Kaietuk on Christmas Eve; and, as all our baggage and stores had to be carried up on the back of our Indian droghers from Tukeit to a point above the waterfall, where Potaro is again navigable, our headquarters during all Christmas Day, as well as for the larger part of Boxing Day, were at Sprostons' rest-house. I shall never forget that Christmas Day at Kaietuk.

The lights were so wonderful on the gorge, and a lovely rainbow hovered over the fall. Each time that I turned away from Kaietuk and looked down the valley I said to myself: "It is more lovely than the last time I looked this way;" and, whenever I turned back to that living, moving water, I felt, "This really is more wonderful than a second ago." One of the most striking things about Kaietuk is its silence, due, I suppose, to the foot of the fall being so far below. Occasionally, when the wind eddied upward, a great sullen growl came up, and the Makusis standing beside me at the brink of the cliff stepped back with a grunt of superstitious alarm.

The wonder of it all makes coming away very hard, for one becomes fascinated by the everchanging glory and can never look enough. When, in October, 1917, my husband and I were three weeks in camp on this plateau, it did not seem one day too long; and we studied Kaietuk in all its moods—in misty dawn, magnificent day, and ghostly moonlight. We pitched camp about fifty yards from the edge of the abyss, a few feet above the river-side. It was a heavenly spot. Our tarpaulins were slung in a little strip of forest for protection from the weather; but a big

A River Paradise

rock, jutting out into the river and overarched by trees, made us the most perfect "parlour" in the world. As I lay in a hammock, listening to the delicious swish-swish of the hurrying river, I could see miles and miles of blue hills and shining stream below me, right away down the gorge to What happy, lazy hours that hammock afforded me, too blissful even for reading, when one seemed not wholly awake, yet not at all asleep, and altogether aware of the loveliness around one! The fall, of course, could not be seen from the camp, but the air came to us chilled by its moving waters, cool and invigorating even at midday. Curiously enough, the mists, which float ceaselessly forth from behind Kaietuk and often fill the gorge and roll in clouds over the savannah, seemed somehow to be abruptly cut off by the precipice, and never came our way. Altogether it was the most perfect of many delightful camps.

But the day's occupation was by no means limited to hammock musings, for our object, during those three weeks, was to find a practicable alignment for a motor-road from the Kaietuk plateau down to Amatuk. A very interesting and attractive job it was, though it involved

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us in many an hour's hard climbing and scrambling, only to reward us at first with disappointment.

The work of trail-cutting in the vicinity of Kaietuk is like groping in the dark. One can see little or nothing beyond the few yards just ahead; for the forest shuts out all view, save when one reaches an abrupt cliff-edge or a little patch of rocky savannah. In country such as this every step has to be cut toilfully up and down hill-sides, and no rapid reconnaissance survey is possible. Oh for a hydroplane, with which to get a bird's-eye view of plateau, ravine, and river!

The Indians we found to be of no use to us as guides to the country, and they did not at all relish the job on which we were engaged. They have a superstitious fear of Kaietuk and all its surroundings. They consider that the whole place spooks, and they constantly murmur about "kenaima" whilst at work. This is their word for ghosts and spirits, and they have given to the mountain standing above Amatuk, at the entrance to the Potaro gorge, the name of Mount Kenaima. From its summit the smoke as of fires is said constantly to ascend, though no man walks thereon. Between Kangaruma and Chena-

Our Search for a Road

powu, some fifty miles of river, there is not a single human habitation, and the surrounding country appears unknown to the aborigines. Our men dared not even look at the Kaietuk Fall when by themselves, and, if obliged to approach it, hurried past with averted eyes. They would not leave camp unless two might go together, and they plainly were reluctant to cut lines through the rock-strewn forests round about, painting their faces with red streaks to ward off malign influences. Would that evil could indeed be averted by so simple an expedient! The truth may be that the numerous caverns of this region are haunted by jaguars and possibly by other wild beasts, and that Indians have been killed from time to time when passing through the gorge.

Still, after many failures we at last succeeded in finding a line. My husband's first idea was to circumvent entirely the ravines of the Washibaru and Korumê creeks, which form the chief obstacles in the ascent to Kaietuk. So he cut a path from the edge of Kaietuk Fall in a direction at right angles to the Potaro across the Kaietuk plateau, descending into the Korumê valley. He then continued up this valley until he reached a saddle, where, at a height of about 1,150 feet

above Tukeit, is the source of the Korumê. After that he crossed over on to another plateau above the left bank of the Korumê, and so made his way to the headwaters of the Washibaru creek. But, although the two ravines had thus been circumvented, no reasonable gradient could be found downhill, beyond Washibaru Head, either to Tukeit or to Waratuk. At last we decided to explore the Korumê defile itself, in spite of its forbidding aspect at Devil's Mother's Pillars, and shortly after dawn one day we walked to Korumê Head, taking four Makusis with us.

The Indians had so persistently declared this valley to be "no walky" that we scarcely dared to hope that it would be possible to get along it for any distance; and my husband, anticipating some very troublesome scrambling, desired me to return to camp and leave him with the four men to make the attempt. But the men hung back so much that I was obliged to follow to drive them after him. My husband led the way, plunging ahead through a thick jungle of scrub and bush-rope. Then, when he reached the farthest point from which he could see me through the forest veil, he signalled to me, and I gave the word to the men to cut a straight line to where

A Practicable Gradient Found

he stood. This process we repeated again and again hour after hour. The going was amazingly good-too good to last, and we expected every minute to be stopped by a waterfall or by a jumble of rock and cliff. It was very exciting and very delightful. The gradient was 2.8 per cent. over the first 4,854 feet, there being no rock obstruction whatsoever. Then for another 4,438 feet of gentle descent the ground surface, though by no means bad, was less easy, and the line had to be graded round the hill-side instead of running on the valley floor. Eventually we were held up by a welter of huge tacoubas, and turned back, our men being tired and sulky. But on later days my husband completed the trail, though from the point where we had stopped on the first day things were not so easy. Obstacles were incessant for the remaining 2,400 feet to Devil's Mother's Pillars, where it will be necessary to make a hair-pin bend in the road alignment, and the country between the Korumê and the Washibaru creeks is also rough and difficult. Nevertheless, when we broke up camp at Kaietuk to return to Georgetown, we had a complete track to Tukeit, and since then the line has been surveyed, continued to Amatuk, and examined

by an engineer, who reported on the 31st October, 1918, that the cost of a motor-road from Amatuk to Washibaru would be about \$92,000, and from Washibaru up the Korumê valley to Kaietuk plateau about \$37,300. It only remains now to trace the alignment of a road from Garraway's Landing to Amatuk in order to complete the scheme of a highway from Bartika past Kaburi and across the Potaro-Konawaruk Road to Kaietuk. What a difference it will make to life in British Guiana when it is possible to reach that wonderland in a day's drive by motor-car from Bartika!

THE ASCENT TO THE HIGHLAND SAVANNAHS

CHAPTER VI

THE ASCENT TO THE HIGHLAND SAVANNAHS

I will make a palace, fit for you and me Of green days in forests.

R. L. Stevenson: Romance.

In the long, straight reach of the Potaro, immediately above Kaietuk, there are several rapids; and the dangerous proximity of the Kaietuk abyss itself makes this stretch of the river an undesirable starting-point for an upstream journey. Mr. Menzies told us a harrowing tale of a bushman who years ago, wishing to cross from the right to the left bank of the Potaro in this reach, made a raft to ferry himself and his kit over the river. When out in midstream, he found to his horror that his punt-pole would not touch bottom, and the raft began to drift in the direction of the waterfall. The man did not hesitate long, but, abandoning all his belongings, threw himself into the river and, being a strong swimmer, successfully reached the bank. So, in

The Ascent to the Highland Savannahs

order to avoid all such dangers, the landing-stage for the Upper Potaro has been placed a couple of miles above Kaietuk, at a point about thirty-five minutes' walk from Sprostons' rest-house. For the most part, the trail to this landing-place traverses the rocky Kaietuk savannah, the only patch of ground clear of forest on our whole journey from the coast to the highlands; but for the last fifteen minutes it goes through forest and involves a troublesome scramble over tangled treeroots, resembling piles of giant "spillikens." The path emerges on the left bank of the Potaro at a point where there is a small inlet, and where all view of Kaietuk and its surroundings has already been lost. Here were two boats, one being a second "parson's boat," and the other belonging to Mr. Menzies. Mr. Menzies' boat is thirty feet in length, built of silver-balli wood, very handy and buoyant. It came up from Georgetown in sections, and was screwed together by Mr. Menzies with the help of two men in this little cove, where it is safely moored even in flood-The "parson's boat," on the other hand, came up whole, and was many days in transit from Tukeit. What a job hoisting it to Amen Point must have been!

Indian Superstitions

We put six Indians into the "parson's boat"; the remaining eight, with Mr. Menzies, Haywood, ourselves, and all our baggage, embarked in the other. A tarpaulin shelter was stretched amidships over a frame of bent boughs, to which a hammock was slung for me. Mr. Menzies steered, and had four paddlers with him in the stern, while Haywood was bowman with four more; and so we started off upstream on the afternoon of the 26th December, 1915.

The Potaro above Kaietuk is as calm and peaceful as below Tukeit. Its reflections are so wonderful that it is hard to distinguish the waterline, where the foliage of the banks ends and its mirrored reflection begins, while the deep blue of the tropical sky shines yet brighter up from the river's heart than from overhead. Primeval forest is unbroken on both banks, save occasionally where patches of secondary jungle and "congo-pump" suggest that in bygone days there were Indian settlements on the banks, now abandoned, probably for kenaima reasons. Whenever a chief dies in an Indian village, the people are apt to attribute any subsequent run of bad luck to his kenaima, or spirit, and they migrate from the place. Indeed, a village is

The Ascent to the Highland Savannahs

nearly always deserted for a short time after the death of any important villager. There are also whole districts besides the Kaietuk country into which Indians will not go for fear of kenaima.

We did not get far that day, as the men, who had been droghing our stores from Tukeit to the landing on the Upper Potaro, complained of fatigue. So we made an early camp on the riverbank at a place where the forest was "clean," as the bushmen express it—that is, without choking undergrowth. Very soon we were most comfortably established. A tarpaulin stretched over a framework makes a nice roof; and we also had tarpaulins hung on the two sides for the sake of privacy, and another spread as a floor to keep our feet dry. It is not the custom in this country to use tents, so we had not brought ours. this was a mistake, for a tent can be rigged up as easily as a tarpaulin, and it would have ensured greater comfort and privacy. Moreover, on the open savannahs a tent is needed as a protection against wind and rain. Haywood built himself a camp-fire, placing a stick horizontally on two forked uprights and slinging pots on it above the flames, just as the bushman does in Canada and probably all the world over. Our fire and those

On the Upper Potaro

of the Indians lit up the damp forest glade and made it look quite friendly, but an hour after dusk torrents of rain fell, which speedily extinguished the warm glow.

Next morning we paddled steadily upstream, halting only for an hour and a half at noon, when we lunched. It was a very restful day. No rain fell, but the sky was overcast until 3 p.m. Then the sun broke through the clouds and lit up the river with its perfect reflections most prettilv. We passed the mouths of several creeks emptying into the Potaro, the largest being the Amamuri, the Seebu, and the Ichirak, and from our boat we could at times see the mountains in which are the sources of the Ichirak and the Arnik creeks. Above the mouth of the Ichirak the Potaro becomes very winding, and there is a place where two reaches are parallel, flowing in opposite directions, so that Indians travelling in woodskins make a portage over the neck of the bend. We noticed frequent maipuri tracks on both banks as well as on spits of sand, where the animals come down to water; and occasionally the river-edge turns to eta-swamp, where muscovy duck are said to abide. We also saw several divers, some beautiful white cranes, and a pair

of otters, so much interested in us that they kept bobbing up close to the boat, trying to get a better view. The trees on the Upper Potaro are magnificent, and the forest looks friendly; whereas the dense, suffocating, tropical jungles of the lowlands give a horrible impression of hostile, evil Nature.

This night we camped at the mouth of the Arnik on a small island round which the creek flows into the Potaro. The ground is slightly rising and makes a picturesque and comfortable camping-place, with a view straight down the main river. As usual, rain poured down all night long, making us thankful that our tarpaulins were waterproof.

Next morning, after paddling an hour and a half, we reached the watersmeet of the Potaro and the Chenapowu creek. This is the limit of navigation, for the Chenapowu is blocked by tacoubas and cataracts, and the Potaro itself, a short distance above Chenapowu, is impeded by serious rapids. The river being low had been favourable for our upstream journey, and we covered the thirty miles from Kaietuk to Chenapowu in ten and a half hours' actual paddling. River travel is, of course, always governed by the

A Forsaken Settlement

state of the river; and Mr. Menzies told us that once in time of abnormally high flood he made the whole journey downstream from Chenapowu to Kangaruma, a distance of fifty miles, between sunrise and sunset. We, on our way back, there being then about three feet more water in the river than on our way up, paddled from Chenapowu to Kaietuk in six and a half hours; but we were far indeed from approaching Mr. Menzies' record. At Chenapowu several trails from the highlands converge, and it was here that an old Swedish gentleman, Dr. Carl Bovallius, some years ago made a settlement which he called He cleared a hundred acres of land and built himself a house, admirably situated on a knoll overlooking the watersmeet of the Potaro and Chenapowu, furnished his home with every comfort, and began a trade in balata with the Indians of the neighbourhood. Mr. Menzies did the transport work for him, and by his direction explored the forest trails to find a short-cut to the highland savannahs. It was thus that he found "Menzies' Line," which balata-laden Indians could travel in two days, and which is certainly a capital path from the Potaro to the highlands. We ourselves travelled over it. Its

length was estimated by Dr. Bovallius' foreman to be thirty-two miles; but, as the track is now interrupted by fallen trees, it must be somewhat longer, for détours have to be made to avoid all the bigger obstacles.

It is unfortunate that Dr. Boyallius did not come here as a younger man. He was over seventy years of age when he began his enterprise; and, though he lived to be seventy-eight, yet time was lacking for him to establish his work on firm foundations. When he died, the Indians carried off everything that could possibly be removed, and his entire clearing is now covered by secondary growth and the horrible "congopump," which, bearing a ghastly resemblance to rubber, grows habitually wherever a clearing in the primeval forest has once been, and mocks at abandoned human endeavour. We could, however, still see traces of the roads and bridges which Dr. Bovallius had made, and a small corrugated-iron powder-store remains in good repair. Of the house at Holmia nothing is left save the four main posts and a few panes of glass scattered on the ground.

We approached Chenapowu in some anxiety, for at this point we were to leave the waterways

The Boat Journey Ends

and begin our long march overland; and it was here that Mr. Menzies had instructed the Makusis of the highlands to meet us as baggage-carriers. He fully believed that the Makusis understood and meant to execute his instructions, until, just before we got there, Johnny of Puwa observed casually that his people "Chenapowu side no Unfortunately, on arrival, we found that Johnny had spoken but too truly, for at Chenapowu we found no one but John Williams, a tall Patamona, attired only in loin-cloth, knife, and belt, who, with his wife and children, was the sole inhabitant of Holmia. He came down to our boat and insisted on shaking hands with us, saying very firmly and politely, "How do vou do?" but he equally firmly said, "Me no carry load." In these depressing circumstances the only thing to be done was to camp for the time being on the site of Dr. Bovallius' house. We never discovered why the Makusis had failed us; for, when we eventually reached the highlands, they were all eagerly awaiting us and most anxious to be of use; but it did not seem to have occurred to them that their services would be needed in the forest. Of course, explanations with a people whose best interpreters understand

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only a bare dozen words of the English language and can speak but half as many are apt to miscarry. Anyway, the Makusis were not there, and we were faced by a forest trek of thirty odd miles, with carriers insufficient to make the attempt. It was a difficult and unpleasant position.

As soon as the boats had been unloaded, and camp made at Holmia, we sent off two Indians, Robert and Hubbard by name, to Arnik village, which in Dr. Boyallius' time was some two and a half hours' walk from Holmia, and whence he supplied himself with ground provisions. instructed these men to make great haste, and to induce as many as possible of the men of Arnik to return with them at once, bringing cassava for the forest journey, and we hoped to make an early start next day. Our stores were packed in the powder-house, and we sat down to await the arrival of the Arnik people with what patience we could muster, by the help of Sir George Trevelvan's Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay. Our camp, shut in by congo-pump and dense secondary growth, was most unattractive. There were no mosquitoes-indeed, we never saw mosquitoes after Rockstone during our whole jour-

Delay and Anxiety at Holmia

ney. But other horrible insects, such as cowflies, sand-flies, and ticks, made life a burden. The day dragged wearily by and night fell with the usual heavy rain, but without any sign of the Arnik people or of our messengers. Early next morning Mr. and Mrs. John Williams called with their two children. Mrs. Williams wore a bead apron and had tattoo marks on her face and body. They asked for sugar; but John had been so little helpful that we did not feel in the mood to be very generous with that precious commodity, and consequently only gave a teaspoonful to each child, whereupon the family, apparently offended, disappeared into the forest and we saw them no more. All day we waited for the men of Arnik to arrive, but no one appeared; and when, as daylight died, heavy rain again began to fall, and we had finally to give up all hope of starting next morning, we felt thoroughly depressed and miserable. Before going to bed it was decided that at dawn Mr. Menzies should make a start, with all our Indians and as many loads as they could carry; take them to Akrabanna creek. where the trail to Arnik branches off from "Menzies' Line"; should there deposit the loads at the junction of the trails, send the Indians back

to us to be ready for further service, and himself go on to Arnik to ascertain the position. The inroad being made on our food-supplies, without our getting any nearer to the savannah plenty, was beginning to cause us great anxiety.

Next morning Mr. Menzies set off early, as arranged, with all the Indians, leaving Haywood as our only camp attendant. Haywood's optimism and cheerfulness were unfailing, but even Macaulay failed to cheer us as the long hours crawled by. Heavy rain fell at intervals, and, imprisoned by sodden forest on all sides, the position was certainly not enlivening. During some hours we hoped that Mr. Menzies might return, having met the men of Arnik in the way; but we were disappointed, and

The weary day dragged to its rest Lingering like an unloved guest.

Late in the afternoon nine of the Indians returned with a note from Mr. Menzies which informed us that Arnik village had been shifted to a considerable distance from its former site, but that he was going thither with one man, leaving two to guard the loads, and sending the others back to us. He suggested that we should move to Akrabanna next day, with as much of the baggage as

The Men of Arnik Arrive

the nine men could carry, and meet him there. This not very cheery epistle still comforted us much, because it accounted for Arnik's delay, and our spirits also rose at the prospect of moving on. After an early supper we had gone to bed with a bright camp-fire to cheer us, when we heard a shout, and then beheld the joyful sight of Mr. Menzies with a lamp, followed by Robert and Hubbard and a line of seven men and three women. As they filed past our tarpaulin, the firelight gleaming upon their naked brown bodies, I could have cried for joy. Mr. Menzies had met the men of Arnik on the trail before he reached the site of their new village; and it appeared that Robert and Hubbard had got there on the night of the day they left us, but had found all the men away hunting. A day had been spent in palaver and in making cassava for the journey, and therefore not until the morning of the third day did such hunters as had returned set out with our messengers for Holmia. With anxiety much relieved, we calmed our emotions and went to sleep. Heavy rain fell all night.

We struck camp early in the morning of the 31st December, 1915, and a walk of twenty minutes up the left bank of the Chenapowu creek

brought us to the point where the Tumong trail branches off to the west. All previous travellers to Mount Roraima, via the Potaro, had gone by the Tumong trail; and, according to their accounts, it is by no means a good one. But we continued along the Chenapowu, and after another fifteen minutes forded the Wong creek. its tributary, while a further quarter of an hour brought us to the point where the Chenapowu creek itself is spanned by two tacoubas, for crossing at low water and at high water respectively. The silver-sand bottoms of these creeks contrast prettily with the deep amber bush water. Thence an ascent over a couple of low hillocks brought us after a walk of one hour and seventeen minutes from Holmia to a clearing on a bracken-covered sand-hill above the right bank of the Akrabanna creek, where there had once been a Patamona village, and where now the line to Arnik branches off eastwards from our trail. The Akrabanna falls into the Chenapowu, which latter creek, though invisible in the dense forest, continued on our right hand, until we saw it again five hours' march farther on at its watersmeet with the Sirani-baru creek.

It was delightful to be up and doing, and we 102

The Forest Trek Begins

enjoyed our walk to Akrabanna very much. On Mr. Menzies' recommendation, we had equipped ourselves with rubber sole canvas boots, and we found them most comfortable and practicable. Our feet were always getting wet, since we had constantly to wade across streams, but canvas dries quickly without getting stiff, and the rubber sole is a great safeguard against slipping. Moreover, it is possible to feel through it the nature of the ground underfoot, and whether it is likely to bear one or not. Forest trails are a mass of tangled roots covered by deceptive layers of fallen leaves, and one must, therefore, concentrate one's attention upon one's feet. To glance up even for half a minute, without first standing still, invariably results in a stumble or in goring the feet upon some spiky stump; but the path is springy underfoot, and it is possible to walk long hours without fatigue. Nevertheless, the monotony of forest trek is extreme. Generally you cannot see twenty yards in front of you. Indians walk so silently that sometimes the long file of carriers appears noiselessly and suddenly at one's side, when one had perhaps believed them to be some distance behind. They do not speak on the line of march, and they move their feet

very carefully, seldom cutting them. We soon became quite adept ourselves at walking quickly without stumbling, and at clambering over the fallen trees that barred our progress every few yards. It would not, I think, be possible for a woman to negotiate these trails in a skirt, for not only would it hamper her greatly in surmounting the continual obstacles, but it would at once become sodden with water from the dripping trees and bushes, and from the perpetual fording of streams, when water often rises nearly to the knees. I wore knickerbockers and puttees, and found myself able to move very quickly and easily.

We lunched at Akrabanna and considered the situation, which was not particularly reassuring. We could reckon on but seven carriers from Arnik, for the three women had only come sight-seeing and were about to return to their homes, each one having an infant with her. They were neat, squat little people, attired only in the bead queyu, or apron, and carrying their children on the hip. We had, therefore, only twenty-one carriers all told, and of these the nine Demerara River men were totally inefficient. Not a cheerful outlook! So we reluctantly resolved that it

Our Camp at Akrabanna

would not be advisable to travel that day beyond the Akrabanna camping-ground, some thirty minutes farther on, where we would open all the boxes containing stores and pack the contents in quakes, thus appreciably lightening the loads. Having come to this decision, we descended to the Akrabanna creek, which is wide and crossed by a primitive bridge in the shape of an enormous tree lying athwart the stream. This tacouba was rather slippery, but rubber soles steadied our feet, and we crossed it and many others without mishap. After that, we ascended some distance up a sharp incline and chose a very nice campingground. We found a level floor for our tarpaulin, while the steep slope below promised good drainage. The trees around were magnificent, and the rare sunshine made all look charm-Bell-birds, giving thanks for the fine weather, sounded their musical "ding-dong" everywhere.

After establishing ourselves with all our comforts about us and a good fire burning, we wandered downhill to look at the rest of the camp, which was made some distance below us. We saw the seven men of Arnik busily engaged on making quakes out of split palm-stalks, having

already thatched themselves a little palm-leaf They were fine, strongly-built fellows, destitute of clothing save a loin-cloth, but their skins are so nice and red that their whole effect is eminently in keeping with their surroundings. They have also a fine native dignity about them. On they went with their quake-making, cooking, etc., without troubling themselves at all about us as we stood watching their extraordinarily dexterous fingers, and they talked, cracked jokes, and told stories among themselves like a gay dinner-party at some club. No word of English could they speak, save their names, which were Samuel, George, Austin, William, etc. Our "civilized" Indians were mostly lounging in hammocks. This sort of droghing was not what they liked at all. After surveying the loads, we realized that some stuff must be left behind, and we decided to leave to their fate our two side-tarpaulins, in future using our carpet as a windbreak or screen when needed, and also to desert a couple of tins of salt which we carried as barter. Money was no more use once the Potaro-Konawaruk Road was behind us. Then we dined under our tarpaulin, that good fellow Haywood making nothing of running up and down the hill

New Year's Day

between us and his "kitchen" with the viands. We had for supper soup, rice, and potatoes, with fried sausage, tea, bread and jam. Our bread lasted very well in a tin till we were on the savannahs and could obtain cassava. We went to sleep with a bright fire burning, and very snug in our blankets. There was tremendous rainfall as usual all night.

New Year's Day also began with rain; and, after some delay in redistributing loads, we set off, following two of our men, appropriately named Moses and Aaron, through the wilderness. whilst Mr. Menzies came behind with the rest. From the Akrabanna to the Sirani-baru our trail crossed no water at all, save two small brooks, both of which are within half an hour's walk of the watersmeet of the Chenapowu and Siranibaru. The path runs for two and a quarter hours' march dead level along a plateau, sometimes narrowing to a ridge, which, we assumed, must divide the valley of the Chenapowu on the west from that of the Akrabanna on the east. At the northern end of this plateau there is a stiff climb of 1,200 feet by terraced ascents from the Akrabanna, taking one hour and forty-six minutes, while at the southern end there is an

easy descent of 800 feet, which lasts sixty-five minutes. The trail was very indistinct, and once or twice we lost it for a few minutes; for Indians are content to mark trails by merely breaking an occasional twig, and it is extremely easy to stray from the right line—in fact, one is bound to do so, unless an Indian guide is immediately ahead. We marched, of course, always in single file, one behind the other, looking warily at our feet and requiring all our energies for laborious scrambles over huge fallen trees and their ramification of branches. It was but rarely that anyone spoke, and our party of twenty-five souls scarcely broke the oppressive weight of silence that broods over the sombre forest depths, though sometimes birds, alarmed by the sight of us, sent shrill cries of warning through the tree-tops. one place we crossed a deep fissure in the ground, resembling that of which I have spoken near the No rain fell in the after-Kaietuk rest-house. noon, but the dripping forest kept us very wet.

Our progress was slow on account of our lagging droghers, and we had to halt at the first of the two brooks between Akrabanna and Siranibaru. The place looked an unpromising camping-ground; but it is wonderful how quickly the

Halfway through the Forest

most desolate glade of rain-soaked forest assumes a snug and comfortable air when man has pitched his biyouac there. On this occasion, the ground being utterly sodden, we placed our spare tarpaulin on the ground, and caused the Indians to build us a side-screen of palm-leaves. excellent roof tarpaulin (twenty feet by fourteen feet) was soon spread; then our two camp-beds with their equipment of blankets, blue pillows, and mosquito-nets, our table and three chairs, lunch-basket with cups, spoons, plates, knives, etc., and my husband's prismatic compass, boiling-point thermometer, and aneroid barometer, all combined to make the place look quite civilized and home-like. Mr. Menzies had a smaller tarpaulin, under which he slung his hammock and sheltered the baggage, whilst the Indians speedily rigged themselves up leaf-thatched benabs. Then, with a dozen fires burning all around, the whole aspect of the place changed in a twinkling.

Soon after we had made camp a few cheery sunbeams found their way down to us. In the forest sunlight falls like a most precious but sparingly-scattered largesse. Haywood provided us for supper with an excellent creole soup, piping hot, made of onions, potatoes, and salt pork. It

was very welcome in the chilly damp, and we did it ample justice. Of course, there was a downpour all night.

There was also rain at dawn of the following morning, and showers alternated with sunshine during the whole day. We soon found ourselves at the edge of the Sirani-baru, within a few yards of its confluence with the Chenapowu creek. This is halfway-house between Holmia and the highland savannahs. We crossed the creek by means of a huge tacouba, and the trail ascended sharply on the other side. Ten minutes later Thomas shot a marm, and announced triumphantly, "Marmu for Mamma." The Indians always called me "Mamma" and my husband "Pappa." We plucked the bird on the spot, and then continued our march. When the Sirani-baru has been crossed, a very short ascent of 200 feet again takes the trail on to a level plateau, which continues until the path drops slightly to recross the Sirani-baru near its head after close upon three hours' march, and that was all we achieved during the day owing to our laggard droghers. We were, in effect, making our way round the spur of Mount Kowatipu, which stood at our right hand; but nothing could be

Round the Spur of Kowatipu

seen of the mountain, and the only object of interest during the day's march was a deep excavation at the side of the trail. It may possibly have been made for gold, but it might equally well be natural.

Our Demerara River men were now very sulky, but the Arnik boys were as good as gold, and appeared to enjoy life. We took much interest in watching them. Primitive man is wonderfully neat and dexterous. He seems to be able to fashion a leaf or a twig to his will, be it spoon or basket or house that he wants; and it is touching to see him hold a palm-leaf carefully over his head to serve as an umbrella, or pick a large leaf to squat upon; for his primitive mamma has evidently taught him not to sit on damp ground. When missionaries or traders introduce clothes. the Indians soon suffer in health; for it never occurs to them to take their garments off, and they wear their sodden raiment day and night till they die of pneumonia. You cannot keep dry in the bush; and, as an American once observed to Mr. Menzies, while prospecting for gold with him in the forest: "In this place your shirt is sopping wet in two seconds, and three months won't dry it." Rain fell heavily all the

time while camp was being made, and also most of the evening and night.

Next day we started in a downpour, and were instantly soaked to the skin. A climb of twentyfour minutes brought us on to the crest of the divide which, sloping down from Mount Kowatipu, forms at this point the water-parting between the Essequebo and the Amazon, 2,520 feet above sealevel. Here on a hill-saddle is a little swamp, out of which two tiny streams trickle in opposite directions, thus marking the divide. Thereafter the trail runs almost level for one hour twelve minutes to the point where the path over Nose Mountain from Arnik comes in from the east. After that you descend for twenty-six minutes and cross on stepping-stones the Huri creek (2,090 feet above sea-level), a tributary of the Yawong, which falls into the Kowa, and so feeds the Ireng and the Amazon. Next follows a steady and at times a steep ascent along undulating hill-ridges, narrowing in places to a knifeedge, until after one and three-quarter hours' march from Huri creek the trail emerges from the forest into the Baramaku savannah at a height of 2,680 feet above sea-level. The character of the forest towards the end was quite different,





BARAMAKU SAVANNAH.

A Paradise in the Hills

and we had to push our way through tall bamboo grass and among thickets of small trees before we at last came out into the sunshine of lovely Baramaku-tov. "Toy" means "savannah" or open country in the language of the local Indians. I wonder if anyone can imagine the ecstasy it was to us rain-sodden, half-drowned rats who had not seen clear sky for seven long days to find ourselves out of the dark, gloomy twilight of the forest, standing in the scented flower-starred grass, able to look over long views of distant tiers of hills into the fading blue distance, whilst glowing sunshine warmed us through, and the most delicious, cool and fragrant breezes blew in our Welcome seemed to smile from every blade of grass in that enchanting little place.

The whole march through the forest between Holmia and Baramaku-toy can be done, and was done by us on our return journey, in fourteen hours and twenty-six minutes. My husband estimated our average rate of progress at two and a half miles an hour; and the length of the trail in all its windings would therefore be some thirty-six miles. On the outward journey this march through the forest occupied sixteen and a half hours, and was spread over four tedious days,

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because of the inefficiency of our Demerara River droghers. The gradients of the route are shown in the diagram (p. 237), drawn by my husband.

At Baramaku-toy our forest trek ended, and we never again spent a whole day in the forest during the remainder of our journey to Roraima, although frequently we passed through belts of woodland fringing a river course between one savannah and the next. The British Guiana jungle is certainly a place where you cannot see the wood for the trees. The effort of getting along quickly without catching your feet absorbs the attention, and I am afraid that I have laid much emphasis on the damp and gloom. Nevertheless, the magnificence of some of the forest giants induced us often to stand still and marvel. The mora-trees, in particular, grew to a great height, and their trunks, when a few feet from the ground, spread out ribs of twisted wood like bastions all round them. When they lie fallen, you are astonished to see how short a depth the foundations of the monster penetrated into the soil. We saw no orchids in flower in the forest, but orchidaceous parasites grow everywhere on bush and stone, and send out fibres to suck moisture from the earth. Even those perched on the

Forest Impressions

tops of mighty trees, more than a hundred feet above the ground, drop down these little, thirsty, fibrous mouths. Occasionally we noticed brilliant blossoms lying at our feet, fallen from some creeper, stretching itself in light and air over the tree-tops; and at one point we picked up and enjoyed some delicious suwarri nuts. But, taken as a whole, primeval tropical forest is a hostile thing. It can harbour no fairies, though there might be demons and goblins. To be alone even for a minute in the jungle is alarming, for such is the profound silence all around that one has a terrifying sense of being inimically watched by unseen things, and I can imagine nothing worse than to be lost in the bush.

THE HIGHLAND SAVANNAHS OF BRITISH GUIANA

CHAPTER VII

THE HIGHLAND SAVANNAHS OF BRITISH GUIANA

The shining tablelands,

To which our God Himself is moon and sun.

Tennyson: Ode on the Death of
the Duke of Wellington.

By contrast with the forest, the Baramaku savannah seemed fairvland. It looks like an English park: smiling slopes of grass with here and there a clump of bracken or a cluster of trees; undulating knolls and dells, and a delicious little brook at its far end. Its area is between three and four square miles, and it is situated about 2,700 feet above sea-level. We walked right across it and pitched camp near the brook. A tarpaulin shelter was quickly made, and we changed luxuriously into dry clothes, after which Haywood produced excellent tea almost at once. In spite of all the drenchings of the last week, my husband and I were in better health and spirits than at our departure from Georgetown. The cool of the forest had been invigorating, and the sole evil result of the ceaseless damp was rheumatism in

The Highland Savannahs of British Guiana

my shoulder, which disappeared after two days of the savannah sunshine and dry air.

But the setting of Baramaku-toy is far from English, for all around this little Eden looms the dark tropical forest, while to the north cliff-faced, forest-crowned Kowatipu glowered at us from among his rain-clouds some ten miles away. He rises a thousand feet or more above the sea of forest, a rectangular plateau edged by precipices, true to the Roraima leit-motif. He is the magnet for all the rain of the neighbourhood, and is generally wrapped in forbidding cloud. But as we gazed at him for a few minutes from Baramaku-toy, he stood out clear and grand, until once more he wreathed his head in mist, while rain fell about his feet. We watched, rejoicing in our escape, when, as it were, he shook his fist at us by sending an ugly black cloud straight for us. I ran to the shelter of the tarpaulin, having no mind to get my nice dry clothes soaked again. But it was only an impotent threat. He could not touch us in Baramaku's charmed keeping, and the cloud drifted off on to the forest-clad hills near by, whilst the thrushes sang on undisturbedly and we basked in the sunshine, lying in the lush grass with no bête rouge to annoy us

The Charms of Baramaku-toy

and fanned by cool breezes. The air had a delicious mountain nip in it, the thermometer at 5 p.m. being only 69° F. The night was quite cold, and I was glad of three blankets. Here we slept without mosquito nets, untroubled by insects. No one at present inhabits this savannah, but there are the remains of a deserted banaboo; and the spot, when made less difficult of access, would be a charming little country property. It has pasturage suitable for horses and cattle, with plenty of room available for pleasure-grounds and park-land, as well as for a kitchengarden and poultry-farm. Within a short time a family established here would make itself almost independent of supplies from the coast.

After our usual breakfast of porridge and coffee, we set off next morning, having first been taken by Mr. Menzies to look at a little meadow sprinkled underneath its grass with water-worn pebbles. He said that he had once prospected this place for diamonds, and thought it showed good promise, but could not go on with the work for lack of dynamite. He had found some ancient beads in the ground, of a kind not now used by the aborigines, and concluded that the place had been an Indian settlement in bygone days.

The Highland Savannahs of British Guiana

Crossing the brook which bounds the Baramaku savannah, our trail plunged again into forest, and ran uphill and down-dale over a number of small rills that drain northwards into the Kowa River, until, after a hot, dull walk of about five and a half miles, we reached the Quaibaru savannah. Ten minutes before emerging from the forest we came upon a stream with provision-fields on its banks, where cassava, vams, bananas, and plantains grew plentifully; and here out droghers washed themselves, brushed their hair, and titivated generally, preparatory to a state entry into Quaibaru village, whilst one of their number sounded a cowhorn to announce our approach. We could see that we were expected by the fact that the path had been carefully and recently cleaned for us.

The savannah of Quaibaru is not nearly so picturesque as that of Baramaku, but it occupies a commanding position high above the left bank of the Kowa valley. As the forest veil falls, you step out on to the ridge of a grassy hill, whereon are perched three banaboos, one on the hill-top (2,550 feet above sea-level), the two others in échelon lower down the ridge. Then come in succession two narrow savannah valleys, divided by two more savannah ridges, on which also are

The Quaibaru Savannah

banaboos. The houses of the savannah Indians are, as a rule, circular, about thirty feet in diameter, and they accommodate a large number of people and dogs. The walls are of mud, about four feet high, and the thatch slopes up sharply to a high pointed top, so that inside there is a sort of upper story, where provisions can be stored out of the way of the starving curs who abound in every village. The houses are only lighted by the doorway, and are, therefore, very gloomy within, the reason for this being that the pest of the savannahs, the biting kabouru-fly, never enters a dark place. The doorways generally face north-east, so as to get all the breeze possible, the wind blowing almost as steadily from that quarter over the savannah as it does on the coast.

We had anticipated much delay at Quaibaru, for we feared that our droghers, after short rations in the forest, would insist on celebrating their arrival in inhabited country by a feast. Luckily for us, the Quaibaru folk, who are Patamonas, were not in a hospitable frame of mind towards our convoy, though friendly enough to us. They declared that they had no cassiri and scarcely any cassava, so that our men were soon anxious to

The Highland Savannahs of British Guiana

leave. Accordingly we made and ate our breakfast beside a stream in the first Quaibaru valley, a shadeless and uncomfortable place, where the Quaibaruvians brought us some excellent bananas, a limited supply of hard cassava—"wood-bread," Mr. Menzies called it—and a bucketful of limes. Mr. Menzies had given the villagers some limes to plant a few years ago, and the trees had done extremely well. The limes were welcome, as the stock we had brought up from Potaro Landing was nearly exhausted. The villagers also undertook to fetch up for us the salt which we had left behind at Akrabanna, and to bring it after us to Puwa.

After a short midday halt we pushed on, winding in and out of the little Quaibaru valleys under a blazing sun; but a fresh breeze saved the situation. From a hill-ridge before descending a very steep forest slope to the Kowa River, we caught our first view of the big savannah, rising as a shining tableland high up behind smaller tree-clad hills on the other side of the river. It was a sight for sore eyes, and looked a veritable "Land of Promise." An Indian trail always goes bang up the side of a hill in a straight line, and bang down the other side, with no thought of gradient or of

Across the Kowa River

avoiding unnecessary exertion, so down we had to go, sliding perpendicularly to the Kowa, hanging on to handy trees as we passed, and more than once taking an involuntary seat. We crossed the Kowa on a tacouba, just awash with the stream; and after a short rest and cool down, the process assisted by a limade, we went on through a forest of luxuriant wild papaw and banana for some distance. Our path then turned sharply out of the Kowa valley and proceeded to ascend a hill very nearly as steep as a house in a bee-line upwards. It was a bit of a scramble, and the stiffest climb we had had since the ascent to Kaietuk, the last part being a dry watercourse. Once on top, the forest dropped away. We had a superb view back over the Kowa to Quaibarutoy, and we could just see a savannah hill with a tuft of trees on it away behind the Quaibaru forest. It was Baramaku-toy standing a-tiptoe to see the last of us. Kowatipu would have been in sight had he not been characteristically concealed in a rain-cloud. We sat down to admire the glorious breadth of landscape, hoping also to see our carriers emerge from the bush, for we were somewhat anxious to know how the Demerara River men would negotiate the hill.

The Highland Savannahs of British Guiana

Haywood, who always kept up well, arrived almost as soon as we did, and inquired exultingly whether "Madam don't think this country worth the walk." I said, "Indeed I did."

Haywood always carried his possessions in a bag upon his head, and managed most skilfully to look after his feet without upsetting his balance. Indians carry their loads on their backs, with a strap over each shoulder and a third strap across the forehead. Their hands are thus free, though Haywood always gave each drogher of our party some additional etcetera, such as a saucepan, lamp, or a teapot. I used often to wish I could sketch the oddness of a pair of extremely stalwart, naked, red legs, surmounted by a mighty bundle, trotting along in front of me, naught else of the man being visible save a pair of hands carefully conveying some absurdly civilized object, like a teapot or a kerosene lamp!

In days to come it is to be hoped that one of the main roads of British Guiana may lead up to this plateau; and, when the time is at hand for building such a road, its trace will probably be carried from the watershed of the Sirani-baru into the Kowa valley by easy gradients, and thence round hill contours, without ascending the Bara-

We Reach the Highland Savannahs

maku or Quaibaru savannahs up to the high-level tableland. But the existing trail could with a few détours at small expense be made into a bridle track suitable for pack animals and for cattle; and if this were done the savannah highlands, which are to-day within nineteen hours' march from the Potaro at Chenapowu, would be made economically and speedily accessible. A launch would place Chenapowu within two hours of Kaietuk, and a motor road would bring Kaietuk within a day's journey of Bartika. It would then be a matter of no difficulty and small expense to travel up or down between the highland savannahs and the coast in three or four days.

We got tired of waiting for our laggard carriers, took tea, and started off again. The trail now went once more into the bush for a few minutes, up and down one more hill, and then emerged into savannah for good. The sun was very hot and shone straight in our eyes; but the glorious air prevented fatigue, for every breath of it was like a draught of strength. Our path ran fairly level through high grass; but, like all Indian trails, it was uncomfortably narrow, as the Indians put their feet down one immediately in front of the other. The hills above the right

bank of the Kowa, below the point where we crossed it, form a grassy tableland with high savannah crests; and, passing through a col between two such crests, we debouched after two and three-quarter hours' actual marching from Quaibaru-toy on the magnificent plateau which forms part of Mr. Menzies' ranch. The path dipped down to the deep pool of a stream, near a waving fringe of high bamboo. To the right rose a low tree-clad hill, and at its foot we camped in a banaboo built by Mr. Menzies near the northern boundary of his grazing land close to Karto village.

Towards sunset my husband and I went up a neighbouring knoll to take observations. The view over the lovely rolling plain, with its smiling valleys, was entrancing, and old Kowatipu actually put his head, rather crossly, out of his cloud for a few seconds. The Karto tableland is a flat, grassy plateau some 2,400 feet above sealevel. It is bounded on the east by the Kowa River; on the north-west and south-west by the Chiung River, both flowing in rifts far below the plateau level; on the south-east and north by hills which divide the Kowa from the Chiung valley. Its extreme length from north to south is about



Mount Kowatipu from the Karto Tableland.

A Hill-station of the Future

seven miles, and its extreme width from east to west is some eight miles. Its area is roughly fifty square miles; and the distance across the plateau by our trail, which ran in a tolerably straight line, my husband estimated at five miles. The whole tableland forms an excellent grazing-ground; and, although there was at the time of our visit no water on the central part of the plateau, there were many streams at its edges, falling into the Kowa and the Chiung, while across it ran a few dry channels, which are, no doubt, full of water in the rainy season. The Indian village, named Karto, stands at the north-west corner of the plateau, not far from Mr. Menzies' banaboo. Its provision-fields are partly in the tree-clad hills, fringing the plateau to the north, and partly down in the fertile Kowa valley near the point of our crossing. We saw no cattle on the tableland; but the Karto villagers told us that there was a herd on some very attractive-looking pasture-grounds near the head of the Chiung River. For it must be understood that the highlands suitable for grazing are by no means confined to the tableland which we crossed, and from which we could see the savannahs round the upper reaches of the Chiung only a little below our level, while

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across the valley of the Chiung, lower in its course, we looked up to a yet higher, and apparently not less extensive, savannah plateau. These attractive and spacious highlands deserve to be developed, and would support a considerable population. They would, as it is, make an admirable hill-station. The scenery is beautiful. The climate at the season of our visit was delightful. The locality could be made easily and cheaply accessible from Georgetown, and would, I venture to think, prove much superior as a health resort to the West India Islands.

We did not see Mount Roraima from the Karto tableland; but I do not doubt that from one or other of the savannah hills which surround that plateau it would be possible to see Roraima, if by fortunate coincidence one reached the proper point of observation at a time when the mountain was free from cloud; for on our way back we saw Roraima from many hill-tops, and even from valleys, which on the way out vouch-safed us no such view. We did, however, from Karto get our first sight of Mount Chakbang, standing out conspicuously far away to the west, a rugged finger pointing to the sky, and the mountains of Mataruka were plainly visible.

Mr. Menzies' Ranch

We awoke next morning to find a slight drizzle falling, but it soon cleared off into a brilliantly sunny day. All the Karto people came to see usmen, women and children, dogs and waracabra. Indians are very fond of tame birds, but do not keep them in cages. They fly about as they like. These villagers were Makusis, and appeared very friendly. Our droghers were revived and gay, having had overnight a feast of cassava and cassiri. Cassiri, which is a drink made from cassava, has a magical effect on these people. It seems to cheer without inebriating—in fact, it has rather the effect which a cup of good tea or coffee has on a tired European.

Our road for a couple of hours now lay over the glorious grass plateau which forms part of Mr. Menzies' ranch. Walking was perfectly delightful in that exhilarating highland air. We had enchanting views of blue distance in all directions. Far on our left the tableland was bounded by the rift of the Kowa River, beyond which rolling forest-clad hills faded into the horizon, whilst nearer to the right the head-waters of the Chiung River wound away among green savannah mountains, in the knees of which lay little rounded terraces and small gulleys, studded with eta-palm.

These hills form another tableland about five hundred feet higher than the one which we traversed, and would probably be a good country for sheep. None of these smiling, healthy highlands are marked on the Colony's maps, and their very existence has, in the past, been steadfastly denied.

Mount Mataruka lay south-west of us, almost in a straight line with our path; but, although we ultimately climbed over its shoulder, our route first made a wide détour, taking us to Puwa vil-From the south-west end of Mr. Menzies' tableland we descended some seven hundred feet in half an hour to a narrow gorge, where four streams, falling in picturesque cascades from the plateau, converge to form the Kowyann, a tributary of the Chiung. From this point the Makusis had opened a bridle track for us through the small forest belts which separate the wide stretches of savannah; and we could have ridden on horseback the rest of the way to the Ireng but for the fact that, owing to a misunderstanding between the chief at Mataruka and a chief in the Kotinga valley, where the horses were, "shanks his mare "had still to be our mount. We breakfasted beside the Kowyann, and then took our way down its valley, steep grassy hills rising on

The Chiung Village

either side of us. We travelled alternately through little savannahs, whose long waving grass and crooked trees, pretending to be apple-trees, had a queer resemblance to an English orchard, and through patches of woodland. The shade in these little forest belts was very grateful, as the sun was extremely hot. A march of one and a quarter hours down the Kowyann valley brought us to Chiung village, where we spent the night.

This village stands on the left bank of the Chiung River, and here a large gathering of Makusis had assembled. They seemed very pleased to see us, and explained that they had cut a broad trail all the way to Puwa. They also provided an abundance of cassava and cassiri for our droghers. The village consisted of two houses. with a third unfinished one, which was being erected for us. The frame was all in place, the wooden bars tied neatly together with bark-fibre. according to Indian fashion, for these people do not use any form of nail. The roof of our house was only partly thatched, and the sides were all open, a fortunate circumstance, as it was very hot in the enclosed valley. We used our tarpaulin to screen ourselves off from the rest of the village, which was about fifty yards away, and at night we

enjoyed the brilliant stars, looking down upon us. We placed our beds immediately under the small portion of thatch which had been completed, for the excessively heavy dew of the savannahs makes it unpleasant to sleep entirely à la belle étoile. Until darkness fell we were much troubled by the biting kabouru-flies, which are slightly larger than the ordinary sand-flies. Their bite is much more irritating, and raises a red lump with a black spot in the centre. Though the lump soon dies down, the black speck remains for several days. defended myself from the kabouru with a dark veil and gloves, but my husband and Mr. Menzies were soon sorry objects. The savannah Indians appear to suffer little, if any, irritation from the bites of kabouru, but the poor fellows from Arnik and from the Demerara River, being unaccustomed to this pest, which is not known in the forests, were very much afflicted. In the highland savannahs kabouru-flies are generally found near water, and the larger the stream the worse the kabouru; so we had to pay for our close proximity to the Chiung River, which flowed with a delicious gurgling noise close to our bana-During the night Mr. Menzies' quarters were invaded by a raiding dog, who carried off

We Ford the Chiung River

our excellent ham. This would have been a serious business had we not been approaching Puwa, the "Land of Plenty" as far as food is concerned.

Next morning (6th January) we left Chiung village at dawn with a large convoy, for all the village, including women and babies, came with us. Ten minutes after our start we forded the Chiung River, an operation which took another ten minutes and was great fun. The water, deliciously cold, rose to my knees. But very little walking in that savannah air soon dries one again completely, a delightful contrast to the bush!

The path we followed from Chiung to Puwa was nothing more than a big circuit round a hill. We should have preferred a short-cut over the summit; but the Indians having prepared a level track for us with much care along the valleys, we felt that it would be ungrateful not to take their line. This track ran through a thick belt of forest, fringing the banks of the Chiung; and the Makusis had most carefully straightened and cleared the forest path to a width of six to ten feet, removing most of the tree-stumps, while in places they had actually swept the ground clean

of fallen leaves. The job must have given them a great deal of trouble, for the trees, though small, were of hardwood varieties, such as purple-heart and letter-wood, and the road-makers were justly proud of their work. We were two hours in this forest, but I was walking slowly, being tired by the unaccustomed exposure to sun during the two preceding days. Then the trail again emerged into savannah, having left the river, which winds away to the left round some hills that we crossed over a low col (1,550 feet above sea-level).

We now found ourselves in the Ireng valley, though at some distance from the river, and we halted for breakfast in the little belt of forest beside a small brook. Here we discovered that we were an enormous party, for half Puwa village, including Johnny's wife and sons, had come out to meet us. The Makusis, as young men, are extremely handsome and well-made, full of life and movement. Johnny's sons it was a treat to see, the eldest especially, a lad of about fifteen. He wore only a loin-cloth and necklace, with bracelets of beads, carried a bow and arrows, and simply flew about the place—never walked, but he ran, and every movement was as graceful as a cat's. Then there was a dear little fellow about

In the Valley of the Ireng

six, Edward by name, who greeted Haywood most affectionately, and became a zealous little cook's mate. I remember we gave him and some small companions a few of the dried prunes we were eating, and they tied up each one most carefully in a separate leaf, and said they would take them to their mothers. I also remember in connection with that meal that Mr. Menzies and I incautiously partook of red peppers, supplied us by some hospitable friend, and cried in consequence many bitter and involuntary tears.

Our path next lay through a succession of little valleys with graceful eta-palms growing in all the creeks, and occasionally patches of bush, through which the Makusis had cut us a royal road. The trail, which had hitherto run east-south-east, now turned back on itself, the direction being west-north-west to the Puwa creek, which we forded after another two hours' march; and from the ford it took us twenty minutes more to reach Puwa village. Our path was practically level and very good going all the way from Chiung to Puwa. The distance, as the crow flies, between those villages over the hill-tops is only some six miles, but we had come at least twice that distance. The provision-fields of Puwa village are

in forest, close by the ford, and are very fertile. One yam brought from these fields and given to us was as much as a man could carry. The village itself stands on the right bank of the stream from which it takes its name, and is situated in a ring of hills, two of which we climbed, being rewarded by a very good view of the Ireng valley and of the river itself, flowing in a deep-cut Everyone in Puwa was drawn up in festal array to meet us, very anxious to shake hands, and all who could boast clothes of any sort had them on. The ladies mostly had their skirts hung round them, immediately below their armpits, whilst the correct Puwa wear for trousers is to hang them round the shoulders, the seat forming a sort of mantle behind and the trouser legs quite handy to flap away flies or wipe a perspiring forehead, as need may arise. One boy there was who had. I should imagine, been away to work on some Brazilian ranch, for he was most magnificently got up in a white coat, blue trousers on his legs, and three necklaces; and he had a larger number of pins stuck through his lower lip than anyone else. He evidently fancied himself no end, so we christened him the "Nut." Both Patamonas and Makusis have a habit of sticking

Makusi Women

pins, or, failing these, pieces of stick, through their lower lips. The Makusi women are very much shorter than the men, but their figures, save in girlhood, are not pretty. They carry splendidly, and I should think are as strong as the men. They are very squat and have immense legs, being beasts of burden from childhood, whereas the men only carry loads on state occasions. Indians generally live at a considerable distance from their provision-fields, and often at some height above water, so that the women are perpetually engaged in droghing. The Indian children seem to abound everywhere and to enjoy life. Indeed, I think they live in a children's Paradise—no lessons, no clothes, no bed-time!

Puwa village consisted of three houses, and another, in process of building for us, was in much the same state as that we occupied in Chiung. The villagers made me a nice little dressing-room in one corner of our benab with tarpaulins and a cowhide; and on arrival I subsided into my hammock to enjoy a glorious cool breeze blowing up the valley, whilst my husband climbed the steep rocky hill just above the village to take observations. Meantime all sorts of offerings came in. Piles of cassava, plantains and bananas, enormous

yams, pumpkins, eggs, and a couple of fowls, one of which Haywood had in the soup in a jiffy. The people seemed to have a great affection and respect for Mr. Menzies, and he usually got them to understand somehow what he wanted, although he does not speak more than six words of "Walky" takes the place of their language. "makey" in pidgin Makusi. "Um" represents "piecey" of pidgin Chinese. We went to bed early, the young moon and stars shining in beautifully upon us; but dogs marauding about amongst our baggage disturbed us a good deal, as did attendant fleas. Indian dogs are never fed. so that they may be keen hunters, and they are always mangy and horribly thin.

Next day we spent in Puwa, as there was so much to do. Everyone was very busy. Haywood did some satisfactory and much-needed laundry work. The Indians drove up a herd of fine short-horn cattle for our inspection, then a bullock was separated from the rest, driven down to the edge of the stream, and killed at a blow by a Makusi, after which all the village assisted at the cutting up and salting. The rest of the cattle smelt blood, and set up a fearsome bellowing. This herd had been purchased by Mr. Menzies

A Day's Rest at Puwa

from Indians in Brazil, and by him driven across the Ireng River. Another matter to be settled was the method of carrying me, when necessary, on the line of march. My husband insisted that from time to time in the heat of the day I should be carried in a hammock slung on a pole between two carriers. This, of course, was never possible when the trail ran at all steeply up or down hill. It was guite impossible in the forest, and my hammock did not come into use for this purpose until we left Puwa. The expedient was adopted principally to give me opportunities of rest without thereby delaying the progress of our caravan. Johnny and Jack, two stalwart Indians from Chiung village, undertook the carrying job. Then we selected from our stores what we thought we should ourselves consume during the next fortnight-jam, oatmeal, sausages, chocolate, dried fruit, cheese, biscuits, tea and coffee, enough to make a load for one man. The rest, together with a few of our personal belongings, we handed over to the headman of Puwa, to keep in his banaboo until we returned. We also settled that the whole of our droghers from Chenapowu, save two, should remain and be fed in Puwa during such time as we were on our way to and from

Roraima. The two we took with us were Edward and Moses, both Makusis, who particularly requested to be allowed to come. The Arnik boys went with us next day to Mataruka, and then returned to Puwa to rest, so that they might be fresh for the return journey through the Kowatipu forest.

When the chief part of cutting up the bullock had been accomplished and long strips of it had been salted and dried in the sun, Mr. Menzies worked a gramophone, to everyone's great delight. This gramophone had been brought up in fulfilment of a request from Albert, the headman of Mataruka. He had asked for a church bell, a gramophone, and "high wines"—that is, rum as a reward for the services which he would give us in connection with our farther journey. Mr. Menzies had undertaken on our behalf that the first two of his wishes should be fulfilled if he arranged to have his people ready to convey us from Mataruka to Roraima. With the gramophone we supplied half a dozen records; and as I listened to the hideous machine screaming out its ragtime, "Tipperary," etc., sung with an appalling Yankee twang, I wished we could have done something better for the poor dears.

Off Again!

A nice breeze blew all day, and we were not troubled by kabouru save in the very early morning. After tea-time we strolled up a little hill close by and enjoyed the cool of the afternoon and a lovely view of the Puwa and Ireng valleys. We had excellent grilled steak for dinner; but the dogs were worse than ever at night, trying to get at the meat that had been hung up to dry. The Indians sat up eating the remains of the bullock nearly all night. They made remarkably little noise over their feast, and appeared perfectly fresh and gay next morning.

On the following morning there was great delay in getting off owing to the redistribution of loads; so my husband and I started off by ourselves, with my hammock-bearers ahead to show us the way. But more haste, less speed! Johnny and Jack, for reasons best known to themselves, saw fit to guide us down into a low stuffy valley, shut off by high hills from any breath of wind, and we struggled along for an hour and a half through bush and old yam and cassava cultivation by a path which at times did not admit of our standing upright. Finally we climbed out of the valley, up a steep col, where we joined our caravan of droghers and Mr. Menzies, who had come by a

shorter and quicker route along a hill-ridge, affording a fine view of mountain scenery far and From the point where the two trails converge, an hour's march over a charming and spacious savannah valley, in which there are some rice-fields, and up a low hill, leads to a banaboo, beautifully situated some six hundred feet above the Ireng, now in full view, and commanding a superb panorama. To the south lay the fertile, golden-looking Mataruka plain, crossed by the line of the Waikana creek; to the south-east was a tangle of big hills beyond the Ireng; to the east the Puwa hills and a glimpse of the Karto tableland; from north through west to south, beyond the winding Ireng, the most glorious stretch of open rolling grass hills and valleys that one could wish to see; and beyond all that, in the far, far distance, was Roraima's great block, some sixty miles away in the direct line of vision. Of course. it was impossible at that distance to distinguish between Roraima, Kukenaam, and Weitipu. We merely saw a dim blue mass, obviously very much higher than anything near it.

The air on our hill-top was absolutely glorious, and a strong breeze blew steadily. The place is too high for the kabouru, and we spent a couple

On the Brazilian Frontier

of hours enjoying ourselves, and ate a most excellent midday meal. Our menu consisted of beefsteak, potatoes, onions, yams, biscuits, cheese, prunes, lemonade and coffee; and we laughed at the idea of the starvation journey which an expedition to Roraima is always supposed to be. Havwood cooked inside the banaboo, to get out of the wind, and his grilled steak was first-class. banaboo gave us pleasant shade during the meal, for we sat in the open immediately under the thatch-eaves. In the afternoon we descended sharply to the left bank of the Ireng, which is here the boundary of British Guiana. river-side the kabouru were one black cloud, and I was thankful for my dark blue veil, which appeared to scare them off me. The boat we wanted was on the Brazilian side of the river, so one of our men sprang into the water, swam across for it, and paddled gaily back to us, apparently not the least out of breath, although the Ireng here is wide and flows with a swirling current. We hastily got into the dug-out and crossed the river, landing at a point where the Waikana creek from the Mataruka plain flows into the Ireng. So we left British Guiana for Brazil.

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A CORNER OF BRAZIL

CHAPTER VIII

A CORNER OF BRAZIL

Across the hills, and far away
Beyond their utmost purple rim.

Tennyson: The Day-Dream.

It took some time to ferry our whole party across the Ireng, as there were only three boats available—namely, two small dug-outs and a large one, the latter specially made for us by the Mataruka people. The crossing was an amusing performance to watch, and very picturesque the dug-outs looked piled up with baggage and people. Meanwhile, my husband and I rested in shade under some trees at the mouth of the Waikana creek, which drains the Mataruka savannah and joins the Ireng through a narrow rift between hills that completely conceal the plain from the river-side. But, once through this gate, an extensive flat prairie lies before you; and an hour's march over it brings you to Mataruka village, at the foot of the mountain of the same name, which we had first seen from the

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Karto tableland, and which had been in view off and on ever since. Even at the village you are only halfway across this admirable pasture-land, which is flanked on the east by Mount Bulakköyepin, a landmark conspicuous during many days of our journey, and on the south by the hills that divide the Ireng from the Kotinga watershed. A tropical sun blazed down out of a cloudless sky, and I was extremely glad to avail myself of the hammock, and to find that the men carried me very comfortably. They bore me along faster than I could have walked.

Mataruka is a large Makusi village; and we found all its inhabitants drawn up in two long lines, with their chief, Albert, at their head, waiting to shake hands. I did wish that the fashion of shaking hands had not spread to this far-away corner of Brazil, and I left the brunt of it to my husband; but all the mothers brought their babies to me to shake hands. They seem to regard it as a most important ceremony, and, of course, we should have hated to hurt the feelings of this friendly, pleasant people. Albert, a very stout and heavy personage, whom we did not much like, wore a pink shirt and grey trousers, all much too small for his portly figure. In expectation

Mataruka Village

of his church bell and gramophone, he had mustered his people from far and wide to meet us. He had also caused a banaboo to be built for us, a very large, though unfinished edifice, of which the greater part of the roof had been completed and also the sides to windward—a fortunate circumstance, as the wind sweeps ceaselessly over the Mataruka plain. We went into our house, followed by the entire village; and Albert then brought up Joseph, our future guide, a very shy Makusi cowboy. My husband asked him how many days the journey to Roraima would take, and he answered by nervously reeling off all the names of mountains and rivers we should pass. This certainly made it sound a very long way indeed. Joseph we found to be a really good fellow, and we became very fond of him before the end of our journey.

These preliminaries being over, "gramophone talked," with great success, and was duly handed over to Albert after he had been instructed how to work it, together with his church bell. No sooner had that been done than he proceeded to ring the bell as a summons to the villagers to come to church. Albert, who has strong ecclesiastical leanings, has set apart as a church in his village a

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very nice banaboo with a pointed apse containing a picture of the Madonna and Child. Logs on the floor serve as pews for the congregation, which trooped in dutifully at the sound of the bell-men, women and children, dogs and poultry. Then began a sort of religious service; for Albert conducts lengthy prayers and hymn-singing every morning and afternoon. We could frequently catch the words "Ave Maria" and "Spiritus Sanctus"; and, whenever the congregation fastened upon any phrase or tune they knew, they all shouted lustily together. Albert himself intones rather well, having been taught by an itinerant Roman Catholic priest. every day we spent in the village Matins and Evensong were duly celebrated, while in the intervals the gramophone proved a great success. There are several houses in Mataruka, and also a corral for the cattle. At our request, a herd of about fifty head was driven into the corral for our inspection; and the Makusis said there were, in addition, plenty of wild cattle round about. Here we enjoyed a plentiful supply of new milk, brought to us in large gourds, and on our return journey a bullock was killed for our benefit.

The dogs of Mataruka were unfortunately even

Breakfast by Starlight

more insistent than those we had hitherto had to endure. Nothing was safe from the miserable starving brutes. They sprang upon the rough tables made of crosswise branches and snatched anything that was put down for a second. Poor Haywood was almost beside himself, and was quite hurt with me for collapsing with laughter as a dog swallowed three eggs and made off with two fish that had been brought as a gift. The fish were certainly very stale and the eggs probably likewise, so it was not a matter to grieve over, as the loss of a precious ham at Chiung had been. We went to bed as usual at dusk. The night was chilly, and the glory of the stars above the wide plain was wonderful.

We were up again breakfasting on porridge and fresh milk by starlight with a sinking Southern Cross before dawn of day (9th January). There was, however, much delay in starting off, as we had an almost entirely new set of carriers. The Mataruka folk appeared to regard our expedition to Roraima in the light of a pleasure trip, and a large number of women, and even one baby in arms, accompanied us on the march there and back. I think they enjoyed the idea of a pilgrimage through the Arekuna country under a

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safe escort. There is no love lost between Makusi and Arekuna; the latter are stronger men and fiercer, but the former are much more numerous. So, our camp-followers being many, the usual load for a drogher, which is between fifty and sixty pounds, was considerably reduced, and several men carried next to nothing. Our rate of travel was thereby much accelerated, and everyone was extremely cheerful, regarding the whole jaunt as great fun.

From Albert's village our trail ascended between Mount Mataruka on our right and Mount Kako on our left. The valley, up which we climbed, was very hot, even at half-past seven in the morning, and we wound up it with the sun at our backs towards an elusive pass over a succession of ridges, each one pretending to be the real summit, and when we had surmounted it, behold! there was yet another beyond. It was an exceedingly pretty valley with long golden grass, dotted with picturesque shade trees; but the Indians behind us set fire to the grass, and on our return it was a blackened desolation. Indians always set fire to the prairies when they travel, partly to keep the trails clear and make walking easier than it would be in long

Our Cowboy Guide

grass, and incidentally to drive away snakes, but partly out of merely childish pleasure in the blaze. It is very bad for the country, as the soil after a burning tends to get washed off the hills by the next heavy rain.

When, after climbing for an hour and a quarter, we really reached the final ridge at a point 2,350 feet above sea-level, the view was glorious and the air so keen and invigorating, so strong and beautiful, that with each breath we seemed to be drinking health and energy. From this pass the most striking feature of the land-scape was Mount Chakbang, far away to the west-north-west. It looks in shape somewhat like a clenched fist, with one finger pointing up to the sky. This mountain is indeed a surveyor's friend, for it is visible and unmistakable from nearly every elevated point in the country.

Joseph, our guide, a most picturesque bronze figure, with his scarlet loin-cloth, his little quake containing a hammock and drinking gourd on his back, and a pair of chickens on his arm to assist the commissariat, was always close to my husband, telling him the names of all the hills far and near, whenever we halted for observations. He was tall and very lean and carried a knife in

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his hand, with which he would gesticulate to himself as he walked, describing semicircles in the air with it, or pointing away to distant hills, evidently reciting in his mind all the different trails of the neighbourhood.

From the col between Mount Mataruka and Mount Kako, the trail taken by Joseph descended slightly across an upland savannah and led us in forty-five minutes to another col between the hills to the east of Rera, a plain almost as large as that of Mataruka and exceedingly well watered, draining into the Kotinga. Rera is Joseph's home, and he pointed out his house far away to the south of the golden savannah on a knoll, where stood three banaboos with cattle grazing close by. No breath of air stirred in the Rera plain, and I was glad of my hammock. Johnny and Jack had evidently found my weight the day before more than they could bear, and had each provided himself with a tin canister instead; but I had two fresh volunteers, an old man, whose name did not transpire, and his son, who called "Misterquick." Mr. Quick is an himself Anglican parson who used to visit the district. These two Makusis carried well; but Indians dislike weights on their shoulders, as they are accus-

The Rera Plain

tomed to carrying on the back, and they often complained, "Mamma heavy." I did not, however, require them to carry me for long at a time, though the hammock was very useful in enabling me to rest every now and then for ten or fifteen minutes without delaying the line of march.

After skirting the Rera plain for some distance past the foot of Mount Kurowya, we crossed a rather nasty little eta-swamp, and then turned off at a right angle to ascend a pass between Mount Kumâraying and Mount Sakmann—a steep and rocky track. Halfway up we stopped to take lunch, where a delicious rippling brook crossed our path. Unfortunately, there was little shade and no breeze, so it was very warm. We made an excellent meal off our Puwa beefsteak, for meat keeps several days in this atmosphere. We also took note of the extraordinary number of people in our train; but, as only nineteen claimed rations, we realized that the others had come independently for the sake of the journey. There were some uncommonly good fellows amongst our Daniel, Joseph's great friend and ally, was a thoroughly hard-working boy. A younger Thomas formed with Haywood our commissariat, and a very efficient one too. Thomas carried the

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lunch-basket and all the materials and implements immediately necessary for making and eating a meal, and he stuck firmly to a position just behind Haywood, which meant that he was always well to the front. Thomas also became a very handy man about camp, and learnt with Indian deftness to manipulate our folding beds, chairs, and table. In return for these services, he was admitted to mess with Haywood, who took care that he should always have enough to eat, or rather that there should be plenty, for an Indian has an infinite appetite and can never have enough. Haywood observed to me once: "I does like to see Thomas eat. He eat so diligent"; and it was an apt remark, for Thomas would squat down to finish the remains in a saucepan with an air of rapt thought, the complete concentration of a man who is faced with one of the great tasks of life. and he would scour and scour again the inside of the pots with his spoon, until no smallest speck of food could possibly be scraped together, before he would consent to wash them. Thomas's wife came too, carrying a baby, as well as a quake with their hammocks and food. I was rather anxious about that baby the first day, exposed to torrid sun with nothing on its head; but it was perfectly

Our Makusi Retinue

well and cheerful the whole time—a fine little boy. Johnny and Jack of Chiung were another pair of stalwart friends. Jack wore a felt hat with a green ribbon run in and out round the It looked a very quaint apex to his brawny, bronze-red figure. He was an exceptionally powerful fellow, whilst Johnny was a dear old man to whom we became much attached. He would come holding out his hand, saying "Mamma" in a most appealing way, to beg for a piece of chocolate; and if I refused him a bit, he would sulk just like a spoiled child, and pretend to be deaf when spoken to. Then the "Pirate," as we christened him on account of a red handkerchief he wore tied round his head, his real name being Alexander, was a cheery personage, always to the fore, despite the fact that he was very elderly; and he was closely followed by his nimble, if likewise elderly, wife. The "Nut," too, having discarded necklaces and trousers, proved a useful retainer.

After our meal we started again up the hill. It certainly was a roasting climb; but a delicious breeze met us on the top and fanned us as we went down the other side. We descended into a small grass plain, at the end of which we crossed

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a narrow strip of bush, where, as usual, a path had recently been cleared for us; and then, following the bank of a delightful jasper-bedded little stream with pretty cascades and crystal clear water, we wound in and out between low hills in a narrow valley until the trail again took us to a hill-top, whence we perceived that we had come in a sweeping semicircle from Mataruka back to the Ireng, which was again at our feet. At this point we were two and three-quarter hours' march from the col between hills above the east end of the Rera plain, say six miles by the trail in all its windings; but the distance back to the col between Mount Mataruka and Mount Kako was only four miles in the direct line of vision. Plainly, therefore, there must be some straighter, if more arduous, path over this stretch of country; and, as a matter of fact, the Arekunas who accompanied us on our return journey did make a shortcut, which took them from the Paiwa valley to the saddle between Mount Mataruka and Mount Kako without traversing the Rera plain. Their path was, however, described by Joseph, with an expressive gesture, as "Mountain-top, mountaintop, mountain-top." We could now see the savannah peaks above Enamung as well as those

The Tears of Makunaima

near Puwa, and it would evidently be possible to reach Enamung from the Karto tableland by a route far more direct than ours had been. Indeed, Joseph afterwards told us of a trail leading from Karto village to Enamung in two stages. That would undoubtedly be the best line for any future traveller bound for Roraima, as the long détour through Chiung, Puwa, Mataruka, and Rera, is thus avoided. Still, we did not object to the longer march. It was all very delightful in the keen air and sunshine, and I realized with great thankfulness that I was now hardening to the sun and felt extremely fit and well.

From our hill-top we continued for some time along a ridge, descending gradually at first, and then sharply, till after twenty-three minutes' walk we forded a beautiful clear stream, almost at the level of the Ireng, which it joined a short distance to our right. Then, on a low knoll beyond, we stepped upon some stone slabs with curious markings on them, and here Joseph said, "Makunaima pickaninny, he dead." Makunaima is the goddess whose tears, shed for the loss of her pickaninny, are said to form Roraima's waterfalls, and this we supposed to be the child's burial place. Then came another little flat meadow, a strip of

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woodland over some undulating ground, and we again emerged into a large grassy plain in the middle of which stands Paröwöpö village. I say "village," but there was only one banaboo and an open building, which the few women about the place called "church," but which contained no holy pictures nor any sign of worship. Our whole party established ourselves in this "church"; and, while we took tea, the women brought cassiri for our droghers. As each fresh batch of men came in, the cassiri bowl was handed to Joseph to give them at his good pleasure. After tea we had some difficulty in getting our caravan to restart from Paröwöpö. They explained that Enamung was "far far"; but, Joseph having prescribed Enamung as our destination for the night, we would not listen, but pressed on.

Another hour and a quarter brought us to Enamung village. The trail, after leaving the Paröwöpö plain, passed through the forest-belt which fills the low saddle between the hills that separate the two savannahs. The trail in this forest had been admirably cleaned and widened, and even the leaves had been swept off the path. Towards sunset we emerged from the bush into a lovely scene, open savannah, with a broad

Cattle at Enamung

stream curving through it in a semicircle. On our side of this stream the ground rose and fell in pleasant undulations, whilst on the other side it rolled up into high grassy peaks. We could hear a cataract roaring on the right, where the river disappeared from view. This river, called the Wairann, is a tributary of the Ireng, and we followed its course upstream for several miles next day. The Enamung village consists of two houses and a cattle-pen, perched up on a grassy knoll just above the right bank of the Wairann. A more beautiful spot for a camp cannot be imagined. But we had barely time to spread our tarpaulin over a wooden framework that stood between the two banaboos before night closed in on us; and just as dusk was falling some children drove up cattle into the pen. We counted twelve head. They were a good, short-horned, straightbacked breed. This was the last place at which we saw cattle on our outward journey. Of course, the herds one sees at the various Makusi villages are only the tame cattle; and we were told that a far larger number roam wild among these uninhabited savannahs, and are shot by the Indians, when they have a craving for fresh beef.

It grew very cold directly the sun had gone down, and the moon circled with earth-shine was glorious, likewise the stars. Luckily there was no wind, as our camp was most exposed. The Indians and Mr. Menzies all slept inside the banaboos; but we were in the open, and, as we lay with all our blankets over us, looking into the infinite depths of the starry skies, the muffled roar of the distant cataract filling the air, four lines of Matthew Arnold's which have always haunted me and filled me with longing since I was a child came into my mind:

In the moonlight the shepherds, Soft lulled by the rills, Lie wrapped in their blankets, Asleep on the hills.

On the morrow we were up again by starlight and admired an exceptionally bright Southern Cross. Then, after swallowing a large plateful of porridge each, washed down with some coffee, we were off on the trail as day dawned. From Enamung village a climb of twenty-three minutes took us to the brow of a hill, whence we had a good view up the valley of the Wairann and far beyond to Mount Weitipu, one of the giants standing near Roraima. The path, however,

The Beautiful Wairann

dropped down again to the river, which curved back to us, and we followed its right bank upstream for two hours in a beautiful valley. On the left bank rose an almost perpendicular grassy hill; but we wound alternately through meadows, strewn with big black boulders, and through belts of woodland, where, as before, a bridle track had been cleared for us. The river was roaring in cataracts or meandering in still reaches beside us or racing round islands. It contains a large volume of water.

Our caravan halted for "breakfast" unusually early, and we expostulated with Joseph; but he waved his hand in the direction of our onward path, which was now to leave the beautiful Wairann, and said, "Tuna (i.e., water) far, far." The Indians have a manner of saying "f-a-a-r-far" in a faint voice that is wonderfully expressive of distance.

When the meal was over we resumed our march, and a five minutes' climb uphill, followed by a seventeen minutes' march across a small plateau, finally took us from the watershed of the Ireng to that of the Kotinga. From the small plateau we again obtained a glorious view of Mount Weitipu, rising high and blue above all

intervening hills. The next hour was spent in descending from the plateau, fording a little brook which falls into the Karakanang, a tributary of the Kotinga, re-ascending on to another and very stony tableland, to the south-east of which was the Karakanang gorge, far below the level of our trail, and so reaching the point where that river is forded by stepping-stones of red jasper just above its leap from the plateau level into the gorge. The heat of the sun, though intense at midday, was mitigated by a heavenly breeze that fanned us steadily. Flights of locusts rose at our approach and flew round us, hitting us all over. Indians eagerly caught as many as they could and ate them raw on the spot, regarding them, apparently, as titbits.

The Karakanang is a most fascinating river, flowing crystal clear in a succession of little vertical falls, or else sliding over long, smooth slabs of jasper into limpid green pools. This is the regular formation of river-beds in the upper Kotinga watershed. The colouring of that country is exquisite: greeny-grey grass, red soil, and bluegreen crystal-clear water, flowing over coral-red jasper bottoms. When we had crossed the Karakanang, the tableland widened into a fine grassy

Into the Arekuna Country

savannah, surrounded by a stately amphitheatre of hills, and we marched over easily-undulating ground for an hour and a half, crossing in that time no less than six small streams, that flowed through gulleys in the plateau to join the Karakanang. The course of these tiny canons could be traced afar off by the eta-palms growing in them. At last we came to a rift in the tableland, where, beyond another small stream, there was a strip of forest, through which, for the first time since leaving Karto tableland, we found that no trail had been cleared for us—a plain hint that we were now passing from the land of the Makusis into that of the Arekunas. Moreover, the stream, where we reached it, ran in a deep pool, too deep to ford; so, while Joseph and some of the men were felling a couple of small trees for us to cross by, and clearing a path through the wood, we sat down under a big tree, drank cold tea, which Haywood had handy, and ate chocolate. Joseph's arrangements being complete, we crossed the pool on his makeshift bridge, and a few minutes' walk brought us to the other side of the bush. Thence our trail gradually sloped down over a grassy savannah to meet the Warukma River, where it races down over a jasper bed, glittering under the

sun, from the heart of the mountain amphitheatre that swept round in a majestic circle to our left.

We forded the Warukma and camped on the ledges of its left bank. These torrents, when swollen by heavy rain, must be a splendid sight, but they would then be very difficult to cross. A delicious current of icy-cold water was flowing in the bed of the Warukma; but wide stretches of jasper floor were uncovered and dry, and on one of these Joseph and his men improvised for us a most ingenious tent. They placed one end of a ridge-pole in the fork of a tree on the bank; the other end they supported on cross-wise poles, whose bases they propped up with big stones. They then stuck short uprights, on which to tie the tarpaulin, in cracks of the ledge and buttressed them up with stones. It was very picturesque. The ledge made us a beautiful, clean, level floor, and this was, in fact, the nicest camp of our journey. We bathed in a natural "porphyry font," a few yards upstream from our tent. The water was stone-cold and clear, and the pool very deep. Little fish, about the size of a trout which would be thrown back as too small, and of a bright green colour, with black "eyes" on them, came swim-

"Landmark Peak"

ming up curiously to examine us. We had a still, cloudless night; the moon was very bright, but not large enough to dim the radiance of the stars.

We woke to find the weather deliciously cool and grey; and, after our porridge and coffee, we started "under the opening eyelids of the morn" to climb steadily until we reached the ridge of the mountain amphitheatre. It was an hour's ascent. At the top we found a fine, grassy, high-level plateau, well watered, but almost treeless, which it took us just half an hour to cross. The freshness of the grey morning gave wings to our feet. We crossed a brook and a water-hole on this plateau, for the country is wonderfully irrigated, and every tableland seems provided with springs of clear water. At the far end of the plateau, before descending, we had a superb view back to Mounts Mataruka and Bulak-köyepin. favourable weather conditions, Roraima, Kukenaam, Wei-assipu, Weitipu, and Muköripö can all be seen from the trail itself at this point, which is 3.150 feet above sea-level; but on our outward journey they were densely veiled in cloud. If you climb a peak rising above the plateau a little to the east, Mount Chakbang also comes into sight. is a splendid observation-post for a surveyor, and

for that reason my husband labelled it "Land-mark Peak."

Our path now descended very gradually in the valley of a stream, which rises on "Landmark Peak" and soon becomes a fine jasper-bedded watercourse, the trail betaking itself to the riverbed, where the smooth slabs made excellent going. This stream is called Aimaratökpai. It was very nearly dry—a fortunate thing for us; but I should love to see these rivers rushing down in spate over their smooth stone floors. The bed of this particular stream had weathered to a slate-blue colour, but there was a good deal of pink, disintegrated jasper sand lying on it. The effect of the blue floor, with its pink streaks of sand and the grey hills above it, was very lovely and curious.

Too soon the line suddenly decided to leave this friendly river-bed, and we had to scramble up a steep bluff about sixty feet in height. An Indian trail always makes a great point of doing the unexpected. We then traversed a very switchback of a path, winding over hill-spurs, until we gained the top of a steep slant into the valley of the Waraïna, a confluent of the Kotinga. The view from this spot, before we descended, was beautiful, and our whole company sat down

Nature's Children

to admire it. Indians love to look out over a big stretch of country, and it is amusing to watch a crowd of them pointing out to each other all the salient features and tracing with finger-tips the directions of different trails over distant hills. Their language seems onomatopæic, and at times one can gather the gist of their conversation without understanding one word. It sounds very much as though they spoke in tones, like the Chinese, but much more quietly. They are a curiously quiet people, the result, I suppose, of living amid that big, silent Nature. We never heard them sing on the line of march, or even when paddling, and they seldom raise their voices. In camp, with thirty of them close by, they never disturbed us. If we happened to wake in the night, only the flicker of the fires, which they keep going throughout the dark hours, reminded us that they were near us; and even in their villages they make little noise. A mere dozen blacks or Chinese would give one a very different tale to tell.

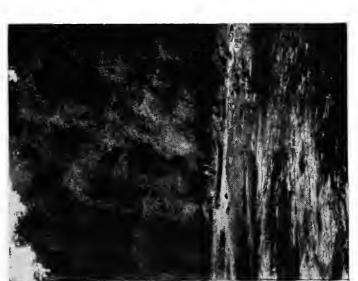
A steep scramble downhill brought us to the side of a brook, which we followed for a short distance, and which flows into the Waraïna. We left the brook just before the watersmeet, and

crossing in the fork a little belt of land, where some fine cassava was growing, we forded the Then a short walk took us to our Waraina. breakfast camp on the Opamapö, another confluent of the Waraina. This is one of the prettiest spots in the country; for here the Opamapö makes a vertical leap of some sixty feet over a red jasper cliff into a clear, deep, jasper-ledged, treegirt pool. The crowning note of colour came from a purple-blossomed tree projecting over the cliff-side. We sat on the tree-shaded ledges above the fall, drawing water for our meal from a limpid, green pool, and the stream beyond wound away fringed with eta-palm. Steep, green hillshoulders formed the far horizon.

After an hour and a quarter's rest, during which we ate cold chicken, one of the four brought with us from Mataruka, and our men regaled themselves with cassava and dried beef, we proceeded on our way, fording the Opamapö. The weather was still delightfully grey and cool, and we met a few light, passing showers—greetings from Roraima behind his cloud-wall. We marched in a steadily widening valley for fifty minutes until we reached the crest of a low ridge that forms the water-parting between the streams

OPAMAPO WATERFALL.





WARATUR RAPIDS.

Empty Pasture-land

that feed the Waraina and the basin of the Kotinga itself. The latter river, however, as had previously been the case with the Ireng, remained invisible until we reached its edge. We were now in the gently-sloping pasture-lands of a magnificent valley, beautifully watered by numerous streams, whose course is marked in the lush grass by avenues of eta-palms; but no human habitation or sign of cattle could anywhere be seen. We put up a big deer, but it escaped us easily. There were signs that a fire, probably lit by travelling Indians, had recently passed over the place, the grass being very young and green, and the stems of the palms blackened and scorched. On our right we now saw Mount Weitipu quite clearly, with Mount Muköripö, an oddly-shaped rocky cone, close beside him. The ground undulates gently, forming a plateau some three hundred feet above both banks of the Kotinga, which flows in a narrow trench below the spacious acclivities of the surrounding country.

At last from the edge of this plateau we saw at our feet the Kotinga itself, with its turquoise-blue water, flowing through a valley of brightest green, dotted with eta-palms. So attractive and refreshing it looked that we little guessed the hidden

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plague awaiting us, until Joseph said resignedly, pointing down to the river: "Kabouru plenty, plenty." We now descended quickly to the left bank of the river, crossing the ravine of a boisterous little brook on the way. The river-bed is here about 2,200 feet above sea-level; and the ford is not far below the confluence of the Kwating from the north-west and the Pipi-another blue jewel in a setting of eta-palms—from the north-east, to form the Kotinga proper. It was by far the most serious obstacle of the kind that we had to negotiate. The river at the ford is some two hundred feet wide, and contains near the left bank an island of some size—the usual camping-ground of Indians on their way over this trail—and near the right bank another much smaller island. The ford runs diagonally across at the brink of a small rapid over jasper rocks, water-worn and slippery, and would doubtless be quite impassable when the river comes down in spate. As it was, the water came well above my husband's knees; and, the current being strong, we had to plant our feet carefully at each step to avoid an accident. We had by this time become quite accustomed to wading over streams, and much enjoyed the delicious feeling of the stone-cold water round our



FORDING THE KOTINGA RIVER.

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"Kabouru Plenty, Plenty!"

feet and legs. Our clothes and our canvas rubbersoled boots dried very quickly in the sun after each
such crossing. Joseph wanted us to camp on the
island near the left bank, but we did not like the
look of it. It was covered with dense bush, and
the kabouru, from which pest we had been happily
free since crossing the Ireng, rose in their millions to receive us. Besides, we felt that a ford,
once begun, is better done and finished with. It
was great fun getting across. Joseph held my
arm firmly, and piloted me with much care and
skill. The long file of our Indians, men and
women, gingerly picking their way along the
brink of the rapid, was a quaint sight.

On the right bank of the Kotinga, in the neighbourhood of the ford, there was no "bush," without which, of course, one cannot camp, as firewood is essential, and the Indians must have trees on which to hang their hammocks. So we moved on, the trail turning downstream to the left and then up an eta-fringed brook. After a little while we forded this brook, and, having crossed a low ridge, we made camp at 4.30 p.m. on the banks of another stream in a clump of bush at its edge. Alas! there was no escaping the kabouru! As soon as we had halted, they came about us in

swarms, and rendered life intolerable until dark, at 6.30 p.m., when they all disappeared. ups and downs of camp life are truly astonishing! The night before, in the Warukma bed, we had had as perfect a site for our camp as we could possibly desire, whilst the Kotinga valley camp could not well have been more disagreeable. It was not a picturesque camp either, for the surroundings had recently been scorched by fire. stream beside us was, however, pretty enough. It dropped in a cascade into a steep gulley at our feet, there disappearing into a dense thicket. But there was no level ground, so that we spent an uncomfortable night with our beds at a slant. I would strongly advise future travellers by this route to endeavour to ford the Kotinga early enough in the day to permit of their camping for the night some way up the hills to the north or south of the valley, at a distance from the river.

Next day (12th January) we were up, dressed, and packed before dawn, to avoid the kabouru. It was a glorious, cool morning. A heavy dew sparkled on the grass, and the air was keen and fresh. Our path continued obstinately to the left, despite the fact that our goal lay behind Weitipu on the right; and we passed over beau-

A Snake in the Grass

tiful undulating meadows, like English hayfields ready for the scythe, and then round hill-spurs, until after one and three-quarter hours' march we reached the valley of the Chitu, a large confluent of the Kotinga, crossing on our way frequent little brooks that tumbled down steep gulleys. Here the Indians and Haywood killed a snake in the grass, and the latter said it was a labaria and poisonous; but is a snake ever killed which the people concerned in the daring deed do not declare to be deadly?

We forded the northern fork of the Chitu close to the point where it descends out of a steep line of hills, and up the steepest part of these hills our trail then proceeded to climb. Pink soil showed through the grass, which was now short and growing in tussocks, so that we knew we were still on jasper formation. The hill ascended in a series of terraces, the ascent between each being almost vertical; and on each terrace we paused to drink in the wonderful beauty of the widening view, for our hill-side commanded a great stretch of the Kotinga valley, shut in far away by the mountain ranges we had crossed in the previous forenoon. The sun filtered through the clouds enough to light up the scene with the most extraordinary

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and exquisite colouring, the far hills being a marvellous sapphire and the nearer country a brilliant emerald, patched with purple cloud shadows. It reminded me dimly of old stained glass and of the colouring of Rossetti's pictures. We were climbing the crest of the hill-ridge in the fork between the northern and southern branches of the Chitu River, and one hour's effort brought us to the summit. We then had a view right back to "Landmark Peak," while in front of us stretched a tableland, over which the wind blew keen and cold, for we were 4,500 feet above sealevel. Such a country! And there it lies, all untouched and unknown, the great silence of solitude brooding over it! Save for a handful of nomadic Indians scattered over the vast prairies. never a man treads these lonely regions.

For the next hour and a half our path lay over charming upland savannah, with here and there a strip of woodland, intersected by numerous brooks hurrying down in cascades to meet the Chitu. We halted beside one of these rivulets, crossing, as usual, just above a cascade that fell into the customary deep green pool. We had to put our coats on directly we stopped to rest, for the sky was overcast and a chilly but invigorating wind

Water-parting between Amazon and Orinoco

was blowing. Anyone who filled these highland valleys with cattle and built himself a jasper house amidst the life-giving breezes of the hills would have his lot cast in a fair land. After luncheon we walked on again, and were caught in one or two light showers of cold drizzle, though not enough to soak our clothes. We descended slightly to cross the southern fork of the Chitu, racing down to its valley. The ford is short, but deep. Then we climbed to the head-waters of the Chitu close by. Here is, we believe, the divide between the Amazon and the Orinoco; and, if so, at this point we presumably crossed from Brazil into Venezuela. These two republics, however, have not delimited the frontier in this neighbourhood.

THE VENEZUELAN APPROACH TO RORAIMA

CHAPTER IX

THE VENEZUELAN APPROACH TO RORAIMA

There, among the flowers and grasses,

Only the mightier movement sounds and passes;

Only the winds and rivers,

Life and death.

R. L. Stevenson: In the Highlands.

From the ridge above the head-waters of the Chitu we descended gently, and after fifteen minutes' march we forded the Maipa, a deep, sluggish stream, with a belt of forest at its farther side. On the projecting branch of a tree a glorious purple orchid, the only one we saw during our journey, was admiring its reflection in the The Maipa probably belongs to the water. Orinoco watershed. We then traversed the narrow forest belt on the farther bank, and emerged into a curiously-rifted savannah, which led us to the foot of another abrupt hill-side. Up it we went, and found ourselves at the edge of a vast rolling plain, Weitipu on our right and far beyond big fog-bank, which we knew concealed

The Venezuelan Approach to Roraima

Roraima. His great form loomed dark in the cloud. This tableland, at the extreme south-east edge of which we stood, extends past the foot of Mount Weitipu almost to the foot of Roraima, and then drops down to the Kukenaam River. Its average level is fully 3,800 feet above the sea, its gentle grassy undulations, broken here and there by clumps of trees beside intersecting water-courses, spread out before us for a distance which it took no less than five and a half hours' actual march to traverse. This plateau is a superb pasture-land, but no animals now graze there, save a few wild deer. What a country to lie fallow!

We proceeded on our way, fording the Arataparu and the Weiwötö, both large tributaries of the Arabupu. All these streams undoubtedly feed the Kukenaam River, and thus form a part of the Orinoco basin. The ford of the Weiwötö was just above a lovely flashing waterfall, and we camped on its right bank. Now at last did Roraima and Kukenaam deign to take note of us. First the head of the Töwashing pinnacle, which forms Roraima's south-east corner, emerged from out of a fog-bank; then a piece of grim, grand shoulder, then cloud-drift once again; but gradually more and more of the twin giants was

Mount Weitipu

exposed, never clear all at once, but hinted at sufficiently for us to grasp their outlines. I felt smitten with awe and fear. We seemed so minute and so presumptuous to venture unbidden into the presence of these towering monsters in a land that knew us not. The glory and the beauty was very great, as the evening sun fell on them, the fleecy clouds now revealing, now concealing, the black precipices. Well may the Indians feel that the place is holy ground!

I must try to describe the scene more exactly. Weitipu lav on our right almost due north of us, rising sheer up from the plain. This mountain seems to be made of quartz, cliffs of which stood out where the savannah slopes had been washed Its southern end is roughly circular at the base, the sides being terraced and the small plateau at the top being surmounted by a sharp peak, which would afford an uninterrupted view to every point of the compass. All this part of the mountain is savannah dotted with occasional tree-clumps, and it is seamed by the gulleys of small streams tumbling from its terraces in sparkling waterfalls. To the northward the mountain is forest-clad, and is shaped into the cliff-sided, flat-topped rectangular block, so characteristic of

The Venezuelan Approach to Roraima

this country. From its north-west side stretches a sea of forest, in which two crags jut out fantastically side by side, the more conspicuous of the two being known as Muköripö. Between Weitipu and Roraima the land drops very considerably and is densely forested. Then arises Roraima's southeastern wall, which is said to be ten miles long. From our camp at Weiwötö we saw it, of course, greatly foreshortened, and the south-western face, up which we eventually climbed, we could not yet see at all; but Kukenaam's southern end projected far beyond the Töwashing pinnacle. At one moment the clouds cleared away almost entirely, and we counted six long white streaks of water falling vertically down Roraima's cliff-face. It had evidently rained heavily, for we did not see these cascades again after a spell of fine weather.

Our Weiwötö camp was very exposed and bleak. Joseph looked so shiveringly cold that we spared him an outfit of clothes, which, alas! greatly impaired the dignity and picturesqueness of his appearance. The Makusis, with Mr. Menzies and Haywood, went off for the night to a little wooded island amidstream for shelter. They had stretched one of our tarpaulins for us over an old hut-frame on the open plain, and had made a most



THE SOUTH-WEST FACE OF MOUNT RORAIMA, SHOWING THE TÜWASHING PINNAGLE.

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Twin Giants

inefficient wind-break with the other. As we tossed and shivered on our narrow camp-beds through the chilly night, we could see the dim, cloud-wrapped mountain forms looming against the moonlit sky.

For the first and only time on the journey Haywood failed to have his fire alight before dawn. His excuse, as he arrived by daylight, was an entirely adequate one. To reach the bush-covered island, where he and the Indians had slept, it was necessary to wade knee-deep in water, and he did not like to attempt the ford in the dark. So we got off somewhat later than usual, and after fifteen minutes' march forded the Arabupu. stream, running very fast and deep, at times nearly carried me off my feet. The water rose well above my husband's knees, and the squat little Indian women were up to their waists. From now onwards until we halted for breakfast. we were walking over prairie land, mostly on the upward trend, towards the nearest corner of Roraima's south-eastern wall where the Töwashing pinnacle separates itself from the mass, and we came gradually round to face the southwestern side. Flights of locusts rose in all directions on our approach. We walked sharply to

The Venezuelan Approach to Roraima

keep ourselves warm. Roraima and Kukenaam were at first impenetrably hidden in fog; but, as the day wore on, the sun came out and very gradually dispersed the clouds. Nearer and nearer we came, the great cliffs, rendered peculiarly mysterious by the flying clouds that partly enveloped them, for ever changing their shapes, till I said to myself: "Either I am dreaming it all, or else I have had a touch of sunstroke; but that scene cannot be real."

We breakfasted in sun and wind in a hollow by a small brook, and then set off again, proceeding to the edge of the tableland, which then falls abruptly down in steep-sided terraces to the basin of the Kukenaam River. We dropped down some one thousand feet into this valley in the course of an hour, and then walked up the left bank of the Kukenaam River over flat ground. intersected by streams and swamps, under a broiling sun, in blinding glare—not a pleasant walk. A march of one and a quarter hours through this country brought us to the Töwashing, a stream which leaps from the Töwashing pinnacle of Mount Roraima to join the Kukenaam, and, fording it, we filed into Kamaiwâwong village half an hour later, amidst an ominous silence. My mind

A Village without Villagers

had been plagued with a presentiment that some hitch would befall us here. Several travellers have reached this spot and vet failed to conquer Roraima, one of the last being Dr. Crampton, a professor from the United States, who became convinced that the Arekunas meant to murder him, and simultaneously that the ascent of Roraima "to satisfy a purely personal ambition" would be "unjustifiable." The fact that Kamaiwâwong was entirely empty and deserted was far from reassuring. Not so much as a dog was there to bark at us. We sat down in the shade of one of the banaboos and sent Joseph with a deputation up a small hill to the village of Tekwonno, about half a mile off, across the Kukenaam River. This, too, looked ominously empty, and soon the deputation returned saving, "No man." Roraima and Kukenaam stood for the first time entirely clear of cloud, gazing down upon us as much as to say, "There is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip."

It was rather an uncomfortable position. We had about thirty very hungry people with us. They had been reckless with the food-supplies; and, when Mr. Menzies remonstrated, Joseph had

^{*} Vide his article in Timehri, vol. ii., 3rd series (1912), p. 18.

The Venezuelan Approach to Roraima

declared: "Arekuna, plenty cassava." But at the "breakfast" hour this day more than half of our followers had had nothing to eat. We resolved, therefore, to establish ourselves at Kamaiwâwong as comfortably as possible for the night, and on the morrow, if the Arekunas did not return, as we hoped they would do, to send out a raiding party to find their provision-fields and to bring in cassava, whilst we, with another party, would attempt to make our way up the mountain. With field-glasses we could see quite clearly, running up the cliff-face, the ledge by which all ascents of Mount Roraima have been made since Sir Everard im Thurn first found the way in 1884, a line of green across the red face of the rock.

Roraima and Kukenaam stand on the same vast pediment of highland savannah. Doubtless in remote ages they were one mountain.* Above the savannah slopes is a girdle of forest, out of

^{*} Cf. Timehri, vol. iv. (1885), "The First Ascent of Roraima," p. 23, where Sir E. im Thurn, writing of Roraima and Kukenaam, says: "Rarely did we see the scene quite clear, a fact which, as the Indians were never tired of explaining to us, was owing to the habit of the mountain—they regard both mountains as one—of veiling itself whenever approached by white men."

An Anxious Day at Kamaiwawong

which the gigantic cliff-walls start up vertically a thousand feet into the air, dominating and dwarfing all beside. The whole scale is so huge that eyes unaccustomed to it are easily deceived as to the distances involved. The precipices seemed to be close at hand, but in reality they were not less than four miles away from us in the direct line of vision to the nearest point. The twin mountains are divided by a deep rift between their cliffs, and from the summit of Mount Kukenaam on the west side of this rift the Kukenaam River leaps in a mighty waterfall, the spray and mists of which surge to and fro in the gorge, filling and concealing it, and often making the cliffs of the two colossi appear to be one continuous escarpment.

Rather glumly we established ourselves in Kamaiwâwong. The village takes its name from the Kamaiwa, a small stream which, after springing vertically a thousand feet downwards from the point on Roraima where the ledge athwart the cliff-face reaches the summit of that grim wall, flows past Kamaiwâwong, between it and Tekwonno, to join the Kukenaam River. The banaboos are built on a little plain, some 8,700 feet above sea-level. We chose a circular one for our

The Venezuelan Approach to Roraima

dwelling. Only its walls to windward had been filled in, so that it was the reverse of stuffy. Mr. Menzies, with Joseph, Haywood, and Thomas, occupied a house near by, whilst the others spread themselves about in other buildings. Kamaiwâwong was quite as large as Mataruka village, and had an imposing church. The house of Jeremiah, its late chief, stood in the centre, the doorway blocked up with earth-sods. He had recently died.

We unpacked and settled down, and it was beginning to get dusk, when Joseph called out "Arekuna yebu" (i.e., coming), and pointed to a hill on the other side of the Kukenaam River, where his keen eyes had detected moving figures. The word went round the camp, "Arekuna yebu." It was a very great relief! Just as night fell, three stalwart fellows strode up in single file. all carrying guns, the first and last naked, the centre one attired in a blue coat and trousers and brown wide-awake hat. All had ear-rings and painted faces. They were an absurdly jaunty delighted-to-see-you air, held out their hands, ejaculated "How-do?" and laughed cheerily. They then pointed to the mountain and said: "Roroyima (such is the Arekuna pronunciation)

The Arekunas Arrive

piff-piff-paff-whizz," or at least that is what it sounded like; and it clearly meant: "It is a long way up there; do you want to go?" We signified that we did, and, moreover, that we wanted cassava and kapong (i.e., men). They squatted down beside us, and said: "Yes, yes, to-morrow, Schoolmaster yebu." "Indeed?" we said; "but what side Schoolmaster and what side all man?" They pointed across the hills, over which they had come, and said, "Wrayanda-aniafpai banaboo"; so we sent off the blue-suited fellow with a lamp to return to, and hasten, his people, the other couple remaining with us.

Kamaiwâwong had evidently been abandoned by the villagers, Indian fashion, so that Jeremiah's manes might have peace; but we never discovered for certain why Tekwonno also had been deserted. The Arekunas afterwards said, "Wrayanda-aniafpai plenty cassava," as though to imply that they were all employed there preparing cassava; but this would not account for every man, woman, child, dog, and fowl having cleared out. It is more likely that they misdoubted our intentions, and removed themselves and their belongings until they were reassured. Mr. Menzies laid it to a "guilty conscience."

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He said the Arekunas are often brigands, raid Makusi fields, and carry off their women; and that, seeing a large party approach, they preferred to seek safety in flight until they were assured that vengeance was not about to overtake them.

We went to bed much relieved, and hoping to make the ascent next day—a fallacious hope as it proved; but really we were all the better for having a day's rest forced upon us, after six consecutive marches, during which we had covered the distance of some ninety-three miles between Puwa and Kamaiwawong. The night was very We piled our mackintoshes on top of our cold. blankets to keep in the warmth; but from 3 a.m. onwards it was too cold to sleep, and we were up at dawn preparing for the climb. Only our camp-beds, our two bedding-bags, and one small canister, were to be carried with us, and we were ready to start before any more Arekunas had come in. So we sat down to solace ourselves with "the virtuous Macaulay," hoping to make at all events a half day's march. At about 11 a.m. a long string of Arekunas arrived, beating a tomtom, and much decorated with paint and necklaces. One man had painted coat-buttons down his naked chest! They brought with them cas-

"Schoolmaster Yebu"

sava and bananas, a clucking hen, and sat-on eggs, also nineteen magnificent pineapples, which they laid out in rows on the floor of our banaboo. Those pineapples were quite the most delicious I ever tasted. But to all inquiries as to making a start the Arekunas merely replied, "Schoolmaster yebu," so that we had to resign ourselves to further delay. The newcomers brought a gourd of paiwarri with them, which they offered to our people. This is a highly alcoholic beverage, and made the eyes of the drinkers shine unnaturally. We were glad to see that there was not much of it.

The day was brilliantly fine; not a cloud speck on either of the great mountains, whose cliff-faces shone red above the green tree-belts. We felt we were letting opportunity sadly slip by us, but there was nothing to be done. The glare from the barren earth-terrace, on which an Indian village always stands, was blinding, so we spent nearly all day within the welcome shade of our banaboo. Arekunas—men, women, and children—arrived in small parties at intervals all day long, and our hungry Makusis were regaled with the much-desired cassava and cassiri. Towards nightfall Schoolmaster came in, evidently the

The Venezuelan Approach to Roraima

chief of the tribe. Why he has this peculiar name I do not know. He is a big, stalwart individual, all muscle and sinew, full of gaiety and laughter, as seems to be the Arekuna habit, and we explained to him, pointing to the summit of Roraima, that we wished to be there the next day. After nightfall the moon shone brilliantly, so that we had an opportunity of seeing the mountains in all lights. It was an unforgettable scene of mystery and beauty.

RORAIMA, FATHER OF STREAMS



CHAPTER X

RORAIMA. FATHER OF STREAMS

It was the rampart of God's house That she was standing on; By God built over the sheer depth, The which is Space begun. D. G. Rossetti: The Blessed Damozel.

SATURDAY, 15th January, 1916, was the day on which at last we climbed to the summit of Mount Roraima. We were most fortunate in having a cool, grey morning; and after sundry delays, at which Indians are adepts, we started off from Kamaiwâwong at 7.38 a.m. Our party consisted of Schoolmaster and twelve other Arekunas, some to act as baggage-carriers and some to cut open a trail where the ascent was through forest. Menzies and Haywood also accompanied us, but none of our Makusi droghers. We had asked Joseph and Daniel whether they would like to come; but they said "No," possibly under pressure, for I don't think the Arekunas particularly wished the secret of their mountain to be dis-

closed to Makusis. However, Joseph and Daniel subsequently changed their mind, hurried after us, and overtook us just as we were reaching the cliff-top.

Roraima stood in clear-cut outline before us, untouched by clouds. There was heavy dew on the grass, and it was delightful walking up the savannah slopes. The hill-track led us off to the right over ground which was in places very stony but for the most part good going, if steep. Schoolmaster pointed to the top of the mountain, "To-morrow"; but we said. answered, "No, to-day," whereupon all the Arekunas smiled and shook their heads, and Schoolmaster shut his eyes, beat his breast, and gasped, to show how exhausted we should soon be. I retorted by running past him, laughing my contempt, and pointing up to the sky, while I told him, "Paranakiri [i.e., overseas] mountain so!" He opened his mouth, pointed down his throat, and said, "Brandina!" which I fear throws a lurid light on the proceedings of former travellers. It was really quite an amusing dumbcrambo argument; but our steady pace soon convinced him that we meant business. The path wound unremittingly uphill over long grass, with

Up the Savannah Pediment

big boulders, doubtless once part of Roraima's mighty cliffs, lying on all sides, much as they do on Dartmoor tors, whilst the depressions are boggy and filled with marsh-plants. The everwidening semicircle of panorama behind us was very beautiful and interesting.

From Kamaiwâwong to the forest fringe was a hard three hours' walk, with no halt save an occasional pause for breath. At 10.24 a.m. we reached the highest point of the savannah hills, 6,510 feet above sea-level. Then we dropped down some fifty feet to the edge of the forest, and made our first halt, from 10.35 a.m. to 12.17 p.m., in thick jungle by the side of a delightful gurgling brook, which dashes down icv cold from Roraima's bleak heights. The ascent to this point can hardly be less than five miles by the trail in all its windings. Schoolmaster introduced the spot to us as "English pappa banaboo"; and we believe he meant to indicate it as the site of Sir Everard im Thurn's camp, when he was searching for a path to the top of Roraima. far as is known, Sir Everard was the first human being to find a way up the precipice and to set foot on Roraima's summit. He did so on the 18th December, 1884, after spending about a

month in camp at the edge of the forest-belt, whilst his Indians cut a trail to the toe of the ledge, whereby alone the cliff-face can be surmounted; and our midday halt must have been near the place where he persevered with such patience. We had a thorough rest and made a good meal. Our limes having given out, we took a bottle of lime-juice with us; and I made Schoolmaster drink a spoonful of it, lest the appearance of a bottle should make him believe that his "brandina" prophecy was being fulfilled. Close by, there were growing some delicious-looking blackberries; but, just as we were about to eat some, the Arekunas cried "No, no!" and made so much fuss that we desisted.

Restarting, we addressed ourselves to the ascent through the forest-belt; and this, to my mind, is really the only disagreeable part of the whole climb. The ground here is a pell-mell of huge boulders, pieces of disintegrated mountain that have broken away from the overhanging cliffs above during long ages past; for Roraima and Kukenaam are but the "fragments of an earlier world." Over these rocks grows a dense mass of small trees, and magnificent tree-ferns root upon the débris of earlier decaying jungle, which

Scramble through Forest-belt

is covered with a carpet of slimy green moss and has a horrid corpse-like smell. The whole place is dank and cold, and the thick matting of moss makes it impossible to know whether one is stepping on a secure foothold, or on a rotten treebranch, or on nothing but a layer of moss and twigs concealing a chasm between two great It was a thoroughly nasty scramble, and feet and hands had to be used almost equally. Our rate of progress was necessarily slow, with many short pauses, while the trail was being cut open ahead of us, and it was 2.15 p.m. before we reached the base of the cliff at the point where the diagonal ascent by the jungle-covered rock-ledge begins. During these two hours I must confess that I was very unhappy, and I reflected much on the superior wisdom of all the other women in the world who had refrained from placing themselves in this predicament. I expected to sprain knee or ankle at every step, and the struggle was dreadfully exhausting—in places more like treeclimbing than mountaineering. Schoolmaster with two Arekunas kept ahead of us to chop open a track.

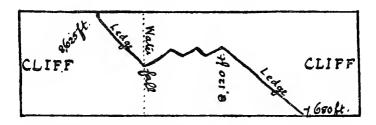
At the base of the ledge we were 7,680 feet above sea-level; and here it was that Mr. J. J.

Quelch camped in 1894, when he and his party climbed Roraima. It is awe-inspiring to stand at the very toe of that mighty precipice, with its blue and red stains, and, looking vertically up, to see the overhang of great masses of rock, ready, it would seem, one day to topple over and grind to pieces the ledge and all that is on it. But until the day of that impending catastrophe the climb up the ledge will present no great difficulty, although there are some bad places in it. I put my ear against the cliff, and could hear the drip of water percolating inside.

During the forest climb we had no view at all, but the vegetation on the ledge, being stunted and less dense, permits not infrequent glimpses of the glorious landscape below, spread out like a great green sea. Lovely flowers abounded at our feet, and the cool air was like a tonic after the damp oppression in the forest. We reached the first obstacle in the ledge at 3.45 p.m., when it became necessary to use a rope to assist the droghers in hoisting their loads up an almost vertical rock-face some twenty feet high. An active man, unloaded, can, however, scramble up without such assistance. A troublesome point about the ledge is that it has three V-shaped dips, and its general

Climb along Ledge in Cliff

nature can best be shown diagrammatically thus:



These three dips are very steep, and we had fairly to slide down them, clinging on to every root, bush, or stone we could catch hold of, while getting up again on the other side was, of course, an even more severe struggle.

At the third dip we met the only other considerable obstacle presented by the ledge. We reached this point at 4.20 p.m., and found a diminutive waterfall trickling down the face of the precipice and falling in a shower of icy-cold spray upon the ledge, which the action of the water has swept clean of all bush and scrub. A sharp V-shaped depression has here been cut in the ledge, which ascends under the waterfall in rock steps, covered with moss and very slippery. Care is necessary, but in dry weather, such as prevailed at the time of our ascent, there is little or no

danger. After heavy rain, however, it might be impossible to pass beneath the waterfall, although I doubt whether, except in the case of continuous rainfall lasting many days, a traveller would be held up long by this obstacle, as water appears to drain away very rapidly from the reservoirs on the rocky summit of Mount Roraima. For example, from our camp at Weiwötö, after a rainstorm had passed over Roraima, we counted no less than six waterfalls on its south-eastern face; but next day, after some hours of fine weather, none of these could be seen with the naked eye. They may possibly have continued as small trickles, but were quite inconspicuous, as, indeed, was the waterfall under which we now passed, for it could not be seen from Kamaiwâwong.

Save at this waterfall, the ledge is everywhere many feet wide, and there is no danger whatsoever of falling off it. From the waterfall another forty minutes' direct ascent over rock-boulders brought us to the top of the escarpment, 8,625 feet above sea-level. We reached this point at 5 p.m. The whole climb had, therefore, taken us three hours over savannah, two hours through forest, and two and three-quarter hours up the

Scene on Summit of Roraima

ledge. For purposes of comparison, I may here say that the descent of the ledge occupied one and three-quarter hours, the descent through forest one hour and fifty minutes, and across the savannah two and a half hours. Roraima was kindly disposed to us, for we had splendid weather for the climb—a grey, cool morning, followed by a sunny, windless afternoon.

The scene when one has at last scaled the cliffface of Roraima is fantastic and almost grotesque. Little meets the eye save rock, which the weather has blackened and worn into many weird shapesa dragon, a frog, and a couple of umbrellas, all of rock, were conspicuous objects at the spot where we camped for the night; but there is in general a monotonous lack of differentiation in the rockshapes, making this rugged plateau a maze where one would soon be lost, especially if mist settled down on the mountain. Here and there are stunted trees (Bonnetia Roraimæ); but all wood on this bleak summit is so sodden with moisture that it is difficult to kindle a respectable fire for cooking purposes, and quite impossible to make such a blaze as would keep out the cold. Water is abundant, clear as crystal, and icy cold. We found no really satisfactory camping-ground; but

Schoolmaster took us to the spot where, it would appear, all those who before us had spent the night on the top of Roraima took shelter. It was in the middle of a big amphitheatre of crags, encircled by what one might almost call waves of stone, about five minutes' walk from the edge of the precipice. Here two large rocks converge at an angle which gives protection from the prevailing winds; and by spreading a tarpaulin over the gap between them we made ourselves a rock-sided tent, commodious enough to contain our two camp-beds. Unfortunately, the floor was not dry rock, but spongy, wet moss.

Haywood had ready-made Bovril in his kettle, and soon supplied us with a hot drink, after which we made our arrangements for the night. Directly the sun had disappeared, it felt desperately cold, and we longed in vain for fires to warm ourselves. At 6.15 p.m. the thermometer was 51° F.—not very low, of course, but when you are used to a tropical climate it feels like freezing. A fire can only be maintained by an Indian squatting beside it and tending it all the time. Even then it gives but little warmth. Mr. Menzies arranged his tarpaulin in a place somewhat similar to the one where we were camped; but



CAMP ON MOUNT RORAIMA.

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A Night on the Summit

when the wind rose in the night he discovered to his cost that the entrance to his cave-dwelling was to windward. He sheltered (if "shelter" is the word) Haywood, Joseph, and Daniel with him. We gave our spare tarpaulin to the Arekunas, and as many as could got behind it; but several preferred the lee-side of our rock, where the poor things chattered, shivered, and blew up fires all night long. The night was clear, and Roraima looked wonderful by moonlight, the fantastic shapes around us being even stranger than by day. We slept a little, not much; and I think that my husband and I were the only ones of our party who slept at all.

Next day was gloriously fine. We rose at dawn to find gusts of icy wind and wisps of cloud blowing all over the place. Our naked Indians looked numb with cold; and, as the few of them who could boast of a shirt or trousers were not much better off, my husband and I reluctantly decided that it would be impossible for us to spend another night on the mountain-top. It would have been inhuman to expose all our company in this shelterless place. Any party that may come hereafter, really to examine Roraima's summit, would have to organize matters so as to let their Indians spend

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the night in the forest below, and occupy the days in bringing up firewood for them.

We had, however, a few hours to spare, and we spent them in exploring the vicinity of our camp. From the edge of the cliff the panoramic view to the south-west is vast and superb, the landscape resembling a map in green plasticine with the rivers shown in blue. All the hills we had toiled over looked the merest little crinkles; but the effect of that glorious stretch of open country is wonderfully impressive; and as the sun, gaining power, dispelled all mist, we revelled in the great sweep of air and space in front of us. Our old friend Chakbang was the only hill that looked more than an earth-wrinkle, save for some huge cliff-faced mountains miles away in Venezuela, which must be as high, if not higher, than Roraima, Roraima itself concealed Mount Weitipu from our sight, and we could see hardly anything of the line by which we had approached. The call of the mountain was clearly to go on, on to the Orinoco, but we could not obey. We had reached the end of our tether, and from this point the return journey began.

To explore the summit of Roraima itself would be a difficult task, and not without danger. It

A Perilous Sea of Rock

would be unsafe to go any distance without white paint, or some other means of marking one's way; for one would very soon be lost in the labyrinth of extraordinary rock-forms, and, when mist or cloud was on the mountain, it would be impossible to see more than a very short distance ahead. We clambered up to a point from which there was a good view of the summit of Kukenaam. appeared to be the same fantastic jumble of black weather-worn rock that surrounded us where we stood, arranged in the same curious amphitheatres. Then we set off in an endeavour to reach the edge of the cliff between Roraima and Kukenaam; but it is slow going where every step is a climb either up or down. I soon gave up and made my way leisurely back to camp, while my husband pressed on. But he found a great chasm across his path and had to turn back also. We next visited the mark erected by Mr. C. W. Anderson on his boundary survey, and walked to the source of the Kamaiwa creek, which lav in the trough of the rock-wave wherein our camp was situated. There is a sort of fascination I cannot describe in these silent waterholes, where the eternal moisture of the "Father of Streams" gathers on beds of white sand and shining

crystals. The stillness and the deadness of everything was extraordinary, and yet somehow wonderfully refreshing. There was not a trace of animal life. In an eastern land Roraima would have its "patient, sleepless eremite," seeking revelation in meditation amid its great silent peace, "in height and cold, the splendour of the hills."

At 10.30 a.m. we "breakfasted"; at 11.7 a.m. we commenced the descent: and we reached Kamaiwawong without misadventure by 5.30 p.m. The steepness of the descent made it almost as slow a business as scrambling up had been. I did a good deal of it by sitting down and then lowering myself with the help of my hands. Mercifully the forest trail was much improved by the fact that all the droghers had climbed it after us. so that the slippery moss had to a great extent been trodden away, and we could see where to put our feet. How the Arekunas managed to negotiate that climb with loads on their backs without breaking their legs is beyond our comprehension. They were a good deal cut and scratched, it is true; but their prehensile toes saved them from more serious injury. Indians catch hold by their toes in truly monkey fashion:

Descent from the Summit

and, if a man drops anything on the line of march, he picks it up with his toes and puts it into his hand to avoid stooping. Our feet seemed stupid, clumsy things by comparison. By the time I reached the savannah slopes I was so very stiff that I could only move slowly. These lovely savannahs had all been set on fire by our men, and were charred and grievous to see.

At Kamaiwawong we were received with great acclamation. The village had, during our absence, been repeopled. Evidently everyone from far and near had come to see us, and there was much excitement and, unfortunately, a great desire to shake hands. The Arekunas would seem to have thought that our arrival broke the evil spell which the death of Jeremiah had cast upon the place. They pulled away the earth-sods that blocked the doorway of their late chief's banaboo, reoccupied both it and all the other banaboos, and held evensong in the village church, singing the same hymn and intoning the same prayers which we had heard at Mataruka. There was much cassiri-drinking and general rejoicing; and as soon as it was dark the men trooped out and set fire to the grass in a circle round the village, to drive away all evil spirits, we

supposed. They danced round the fires they had lit like madmen, in order to "send kenaima far." Next day a feast was held in honour of the reopening of the village. Tekwonno, we gathered, had never been really abandoned. Indeed, it is more than likely that its inhabitants, having news of our approach, with a large following of Makusis, considered it prudent to evacuate Tekwonno until, by observing us from the neighbouring hills, they were satisfied of our peaceful intentions.

Roraima wore a cloud-cap during the evening, so we congratulated ourselves on having decided to come down; and during the night we saw the wonderful effect of a brilliant moon lighting up the gleaming clouds that rested on the black precipices of the twin giants—our last view of them from Kamaiwâwong, for next morning they were quite invisible. We had an excellent night's rest, which I think we well deserved; and, having blocked in with a tarpaulin a good deal more of the sides of our banaboo, we were quite warm by comparison with our experience of the previous night.

THE RETURN JOURNEY

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CHAPTER XI

THE RETURN JOURNEY

Alas, that the longest hill Must end in a vale; but still, Who climbs with toil, wheresoe'er, Shall find wings waiting there.

H. C. BEECHING.

Many farewells and the bringing up of piles of cassava for the support of our caravan delayed our start from Kamaiwawong on the return journey to Mataruka. We had asked Schoolmaster to send two men with us to bring back from Puwa the salt and the cloth which was to be the recompense of those Arekunas who had assisted us; but instead of sending two men, Schoolmaster himself and the entire party who had climbed Roraima with us gaily accompanied our march back. It was a delightful morning, with alternate showers and sunshine and gloriously cool winds. We retraced our steps until we were close to the spot where we breakfasted on the 13th January, and here we halted again for our midday meal at a delicious spot under a big tree, sitting amidst fragrant bracken and pretending to be in Eng-

The Return Journey

land. The walk had unstiffened our muscles, cramped by the long descent of the day before, and we felt quite fit and fresh.

Schoolmaster, who now acted as guide, applied for permission to lead us back by a line different from that which we had traversed on the outward journey. We agreed; and in the end Schoolmaster brought us to Mataruka by a trail which interlaced with Joseph's so as roughly to form the figure 8. Our first divergence was to the left in the direction of Weitipu; and plainly any trail which avoided the long sweep to the west round by the head-waters of the Chitu was likely to be a short-cut. Then, after wheeling to the left, we descended somewhat abruptly to a little plateau on which stands Maurekmutta banaboo, the home of a solitary Arekuna family. Here Schoolmaster showed us another line running almost straight towards Kamaiwawong. It would probably have been preferable to the one we had walked, and might have saved some climbing. Why they had not led us that way we could not make out: but. of course, to an Indian time is of no importance, unless he is hungry, and the tramp of half a dozen extra miles is a mere trifle. No one was at home in this banaboo.

A New Way Back

We next descended yet farther, until, after one and a quarter hours' march beyond the point of divergence from Joseph's trail, we reached and forded the Arabupu (3,780 feet above sea-level). Here we were met by quite a heavy shower of cold rain. Twenty minutes later we crossed the Gunguila, a confluent of the Arabupu; and another ten minutes' march brought us to the brow of a hill, 4,060 feet above sea-level, where it became evident that we were making straight for the southern spur of Mount Weitipu across the folds and rifts of a plateau. We could, in fact, see our trail running ahead past the very toe of Weitipu; but as, on descending, the path followed a valley in the diametrically opposite direction, we were reminded—and not for the first time either—that Indian trails are like the paths in the garden of the talking flowers in Alice through the Looking-Glass, and that to get anywhere you must turn and walk in the opposite direction. We crossed two more small streams. and then, after a further fifty-six minutes' march. we halted for the night on the right bank of the Erkov River, in a little copse, evidently the recognized Indian camping-ground, and much preferable to the bleak camp at Weiwötö on

The Return Journey

Joseph's trail. The Erkoy is another confluent of the Arabupu, and from a little clump of trees on a level terrace where we camped the ground dropped away abruptly to the river. A steep grass hill on the left bank protected us nicely on the windward side, whilst the lee-side was open to the savannah. In the watery rays of the evening sun Roraima and Kukenaam stood clear for the first time that day. We could no longer see the south-western wall up which we had climbed, but we had a splendid view of the south-eastern escarpment. The clear, swift-running Erkoy almost tempted us to bathe, but it was too cold to venture. We had a fine night, though once or twice, as the rush of the wind shook the tree-tops, we woke up sufficiently to rejoice that we were not on the exposed tableland. The Makusis camped all round us, while the Arekunas slung their hammocks in a clump of trees a little way downstream.

Next morning (18th January) was gloriously fine, and we saw Roraima and Kukenaam for the last time at close quarters, shining red in the dawn. We forded the Erkoy, which flows swiftly and came icy cold well over our knees; and then, ascending the steep bank on the other side, we

Round the Spur of Weitipu

found ourselves once more on a rolling plateau with the trail we had seen passing over the toe of Weitipu, now just ahead. I loved the walk over the fresh grass of this shining tableland, amidst the indescribable peace of its mighty silence. The trail was almost level, save for little descents into the channels of the many streams that come racing down Weitipu's steep flanks; and in the keen, fresh morning air mere movement was a joydifferent indeed to one's feelings on the low. hot coast-lands! In succession we crossed the Kamaoura-wong, two small swamps, the Tongkoy, and the Sappi, all streams which tumble in picturesque cascades from Weitipu; and after an hour's march we crossed the southern spur of Weitipu himself. He is a very attractive mountain, majestic, but without the bleak austerity of Roraima and His southern summit would afford Kukenaam. a splendid camping-ground, and several of his terraces would make beautiful house-sites. In China such a mountain would have been studded with temples and monasteries, but I have never heard of anyone climbing to the top of Weitipu. It would not be difficult to do this, though rather strenuous, and I should love to go back one day and make the ascent. On the spur of Weitipu,

The Return Journey

where we stood (4,100 feet above sea-level), Schoolmaster showed us yet another trail—the most direct of all—branching off to Kamaiwâwong!

We then crossed two more streams—a small one called the Apa, and a larger one called the Perumak. The latter is fringed by forest, and is probably identical with the river Maipa, crossed by Joseph's trail. A glorious grassy savannah spreads out on both sides of this narrow strip of woodland; and in it, just beyond the Perumak ford, an hour's march from the spur of Weitipu, stands a solitary banaboo, near which the trail to Tumong, by which Dr. Crampton travelled in 1911, branches off to the left. We kept to the right, and eighteen minutes later reached the crest of a ridge, which appears to form the divide between the watershed of the Orinoco and of the Amazon. At this point, therefore, we presumably returned from Venezuela to Brazil. The divide here is 3,860 feet above sea-level.

We now descended into a charming valley, and, after forty minutes' march, halted for our midday meal beside the Muruïna, a pretty little tributary of the Kotinga. Once more we recognized the jasper formation, and we established ourselves on

From Venezuela into Brazil

a tree-shaded ledge above a deep, clear pool. This place is a recognized Arekuna camping-ground. The creek is forded just above a waterfall, where its two branches meet. Within the fork is a copse, and at the season of our visit there ran along the side of the stream a dry rock-ledge which would form a roomy and level tent-floor. I remember that, whilst we waited for Haywood's preparations, we regaled ourselves on the last of the delicious pineapples, carried with us from Kamaiwâwong. It tasted most especially nice after our three hours' walk.

Another ascent and descent brought us, twenty minutes after restarting, to the Tunâpun creek. We crossed it, and thirty-eight minutes later we had climbed to the top of the hill-ridge (3,670 feet above sea-level), overlooking the full width of the Kotinga valley right across to "Landmark Peak." This was the same hill-ridge that we had climbed, much farther to the west, on the 12th January; but the fierce midday sun had sucked up all colour from the landscape, and it no longer looked the fairyland which it had seemed on that early morning. Now came an abrupt descent, very warm work and lasting just an hour, to the point where the Töpa creek is forded close by a

The Return Journey

solitary banaboo. Suddenly our procession halted. The magic word waikin was passed along, and we all squatted down on the ground, while Schoolmaster and Joseph stalked two big deer not far away. Schoolmaster crept to within point-blank range of one animal and fired. Alas! his stock of powder and shot was practically exhausted, so he had given his old fowling-piece a most insufficient charge; and the deer, though hit, bounded away uphill with its companion. Behold Joseph and Schoolmaster racing after them up the steep slope like a pair of dogs! They rejoined us later very crestfallen; and Schoolmaster gesticulated to me as graphic an account of the whole business as ever disappointed sportsman poured into the ear of sympathizing lady.

For the rest of the day's march the trail lay over spacious undulating pasture-lands, crossing three small streams, fringed by eta-palms; and, after two and a quarter hours' march from the Töpa crossing, we reached and forded the Kotinga at the same point as on our outward journey, thus completing one loop of the figure 8. We then made our way over rocks up a little ravine on the left bank and camped in bush upon a small level terrace at the edge of a brook. It was a nasty,



Mount Weitipu from the left bank of the Kotinga River.

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An Accident in the Kotinga Valley

stuffy place, full of ants; but we cared little for that, as we were practically free from the kabouru. My husband unfortunately caught his foot in some bush rope lying on the rocks and fell heavily, breaking the little finger of his left hand, which caused him great pain. The Kotinga valley, it seems, was destined to be disagreeable to us.

When, next morning, we emerged from our ravine on to the brow of a bluff above the Kotinga, we were delighted to see a most interesting and novel aspect of Roraima, which was really rather astonishing, for there had been no hint of such a view either the evening before or on our outward journey. The morning was gloriously clear, and on the left, behind Weitipu, the south-eastern face of Roraima projected clear and red, and beyond that again Kukenaam's southern end; whilst on the right of Weitipu we saw plainly, not only the other end of Roraima's south-eastern wall, but also a small and foreshortened portion of the eastern escarpment. This view enabled us in a small degree to grasp the enormous area of It is impossible to do so when opposite one great wall only; for Roraima is an immense, irregular quadrilateral, of which the south-eastern side, ten miles in length, is the

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longest, and the area of the summit, flanked all round by precipices, cannot be less than fifty square miles.

From the Kotinga ford to the pass at "Landmark Peak "Schoolmaster's trail coincided with Joseph's, but from "Landmark Peak" to the Rera valley we traversed a new line of country. This time we swung off to the right, and we hoped to be led along the ridge of the mountain amphitheatre which encircles the Warukma and Karakanang plateau. But an Indian trail is nothing if not surprising. For the first half-hour we did indeed continue on the high tableland at the same altitude as the pass (3,150 feet above sea-level), erossing two streams; but then we wheeled sharply to the right, and, passing between two low knolls, left the tableland by a narrow path skirting round the contours of a hill and affording a view over a sea of jagged peaks tumbled together without apparent rhyme or reason. It was a most astonishingly tangled-looking country, with vallevs running at angles to each other and hills flung about pell-mell in the midst of them, as though the powers engaged in making this place had got tired of their work and flung it all down anyhow and left it. The colouring, too, was curious, vivid

A Welter of Hills

red, black, and green; for many fires had evidently seared the countryside, the most recent leaving black patches, which contrasted oddly with the bright green of new grass springing up where the land had peace, and with the red soil on the hillsides, whence heavy rain had washed away the black ash, but where as yet forgiving Nature had not reasserted herself. For half an hour our path clung to the hill-side, but it then gave that up as a bad job and dropped abruptly into one of the narrow valleys beneath. The prospect was certainly not an inviting one. We consoled ourselves, however, with the reflection that the divergence to the right must have put us in a direct line for Mount Mataruka. A short but heavy shower of rain now drenched us to the skin; but it was welcome, as relieving an unwonted sultriness of the atmosphere. Round the base of the hill we curved, climbed over a knoll in the valley, and so, after three-quarters of an hour's march, we came to the left bank of a creek called the Walamwötö, presumably a tributary of the Kotinga. Here we pitched camp in a small winding valley (2,450 feet above sea-level) by the side of a charming pool. As we were establishing ourselves under our tarpaulin, a storm of wind and rain almost blew it

away from its moorings, and six Makusis had to hold it up on the weather side until the fierceness of the gusts abated. We caused the ridge-pole to be lowered considerably so as to afford less target for the wind, and I was somewhat anxious about the night. But after dark the weather became beautifully still and clear, a full moon making diamonds everywhere of the lingering rain-drops. This was the only rain-storm of any moment which we encountered from the day we left the Kowatipu forest until the day of our return to it. During the whole of the rest of our savannah journey we enjoyed superb weather, sunny, breezy, cool, and rainless, save for occasional Scotch mist upon the hill-tops.

We rose very early next day (20th January), and broke our fast by lamplight. But the sun soon rose clear and very hot, and I realized that the strenuous exertions of the five preceding days without a rest were beginning to tell on me. So the start did not find me very fresh. An hour's march in narrow winding ravines, followed by a short climb over a long black-bouldered slope, brought us to James's banaboo (2,720 feet above sea-level), perched upon a hill-top. The inhabitants came out in a string to greet us, and the

"Schoolmaster's" Trail

second man in the line, as he shook my hand (the ceremony none of them will forego), ejaculated questioningly "Mamma?" and all his companions echoed the cry. It must be seldom, if ever, that a white woman is seen by these people. The view from this lonely banaboo was certainly enchanting; but, alas! no tableland such as we had hoped to see lay unrolled before us, only a fresh tangle of hills and valleys; and, though the country looked most interesting, it also looked very arduous. Moreover, there ensued an argument between Joseph and Schoolmaster as to the right road onwards, and we wondered whether they really knew the way, or were merely proceeding by trial and error. The long ridge of tableland, over the crest of which we had hoped to travel when we turned aside from Joseph's line at "Landmark Peak," looked most provoking away to the left. At length our guides reconciled their difference, whatever it may have been, and led us three hundred feet downwards over a broad hill-shoulder across a small stream. Then, after a long, gradual ascent over another broad hill-shoulder, we came to the top of a commanding hill, 2,960 feet above sea-level. Here indeed we were comforted, for we saw again Mount Mataruka,

and realized that we were making for it by a much more direct line than if we had returned through Enamung. Besides, a nice undulating ridge lay before us, and the view was grand. We could see a magnificent expanse of country on all sides. Far, far behind lay Weitipu, with Roraima and Kukenaam at his back, bidding us a last good-bye. We saw them no more after this. I wonder if we ever shall again! On the right we had an excellent view of our former line of journey, the plateau of the Karakanang and the grassy peaks of Enamung, as well as of a big waterfall shining white in the distance, whither our outward journey had unfortunately not led us. Our guides said that it was a fall on the Wairann; and at close quarters it must be a fine sight, for even at a distance of about seven miles it was a striking feature in the landscape. At this point we were one hour and six minutes' march from James's banaboo.

We continued for another forty minutes along the crest of the hill-ridge, enjoying intensely the glorious scenery, and finally reaching a point (2,810 feet above sea-level) whence, beyond a cleft in the hills, cut athwart our line of march by the Karakanang River, we could see the long, straight

A Study in Exquisite Colours

line of the Paiwa valley, down which lay our forward path. Fifty minutes' sharp descent, largely through forest, then brought us to a ford of jasper slabs over the Karakanang (1,960 feet above sea-Here we made our midday meal, and thereafter we ascended the valley of a brook, which falls into the Karakanang at the ford; and, climbing over some hillocks shut in between high hill-ranges on both sides, we came, after an hour and a half, to the Paiwa River (2,210 feet above sea-level), down which our trail then ran for three and a half hours' actual march. It was most fascinating scenery. The turquoise-blue Paiwa in its rose-pink bed (for the blood-red jasper weathers on the surface to pink) flowed clear as crystal through opal-green pools and in rippling white cascades, whilst shade trees, dotted here and there, relieved the glare of the brilliant light. Beneath one such tree, seated on pink sand close to the edge of the stream, we enjoyed our usual tea halt. The sides of the valley are seamed with confluent brooks, many of which had water even at this height of the dry season. In wet weather the smiling stream must be a very torrent.

At first the Paiwa had all the appearance of making for the Ireng; but at a point a little more

than halfway in that part of its course which we followed it turned abruptly off to the south and swept past Mount Pakara to join the Kotinga. Towards sunset we crossed to its left bank, where was a broad level stretch of sand, evidently a favourite Indian camping-ground, but rather a disappointing one to me, as there was a rift in the jasper formation just here, and the stream merely gurgled over quite ordinary stones, while the sand was a commonplace white. Moreover, the steep hill-side across the stream had been hideously burnt, and there were evidences of recent Indian encampment and of fish-poisoning in the river. Indians are an admirable people in many ways, but they scarcely deserve their goodly heritage, since all that they do for their beautiful country is to poison the fish in its exquisite streams and to disfigure the fair hills by continual grass-burning.

Next day we ate our porridge and drank our coffee before dawn, as the moon sank behind the trees. Then, after following the river for a short distance, we climbed up through a copse to where a banaboo was perched on a bluff, the Paiwa below making a right-angled turn, so that those who live here have an excellent vantage-ground whence they can watch all wayfarers whether up or down

In Rera Plain Once More

stream. At the banaboo we found Schoolmaster and his Arekunas, who had evidently spent the night there, leaving the Makusis with us; and after a short colloquy Joseph led us down into the Paiwa valley once more. The Arekunas remained behind, and made for Mataruka by that line of their own which Joseph had graphically described as "Mountain-top, mountain-top," on the day of our trek to Enamung.

The Paiwa, which had grown to a considerable size, now reverted again to a jasper bed, fringed this time with eta-palms, and looking prettier than We walked along its bank most of the way; but at times the valley would close in to a gorge and the river run in cataracts, while we would have to climb over rocky bluffs. At last we crossed the blue waters of this pleasant river for the last time, and finally quitted the Paiwa watershed. Our trail now wound away to the left, choosing most cleverly a low divide, and then equally cleverly winding in and out on the level round the spur of our old friend Kumaraying, until we found ourselves in the Rera plain once more. It would have been a pretty path but for the desolation and destruction wrought by fire. Some men ahead of us actually started two

fresh fires, which were fiercely burning as we passed.

At the special request of our people we went to Joseph's banaboo for our midday meal. wife provided us with abundance of delicious fresh eggs, and I confess, without any desire to teach my grandmother, that at times the best way of eating eggs is to suck them. A few minutes' walk brought us back to the trail by which we had travelled on our outward journey, so completing the second loop in the figure 8. We now followed our former line of march the rest of the way back to Mataruka village, where we were warmly received by Albert and the inhabitants. The Arekunas we passed at a brook a few minutes from the village, busily engaged in washing and painting their faces afresh. They then made a state entry behind us, beating a tom-tom.

The rest of our travels needs no description, for the line of our homeward march was identical with that of our outward journey. The distance between Mataruka and Kamaiwâwong by Joseph's trail was a march of thirty-two hours forty-seven minutes; and the return journey between the same villages by Schoolmaster's trail was a march of thirty-two hours fifty-one minutes,

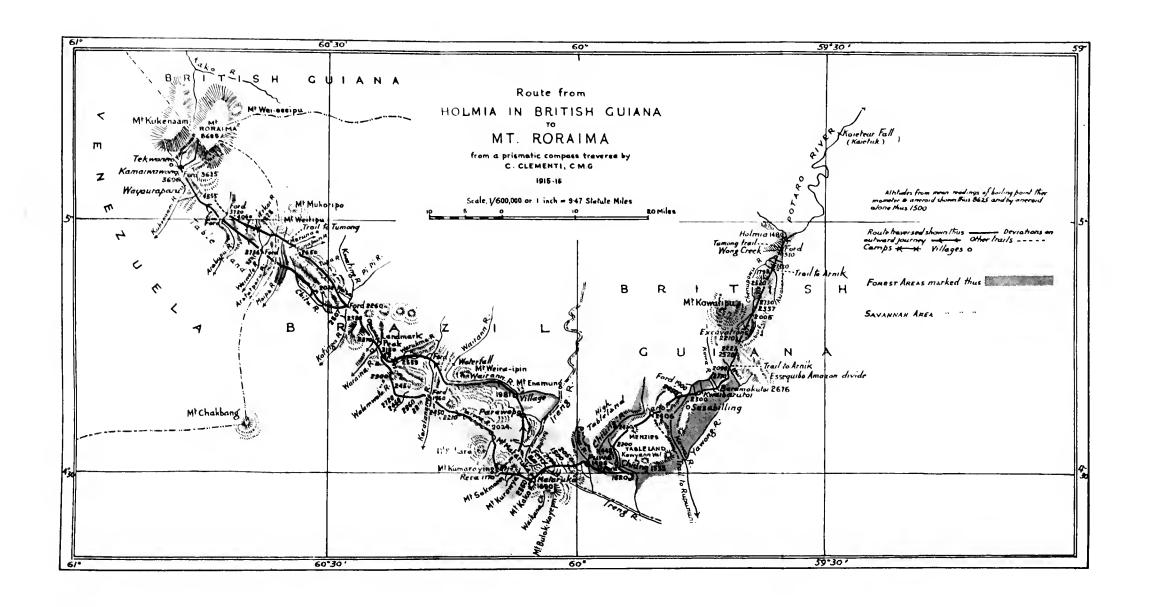
A Country for Undine

of which eleven hours twenty-eight minutes were occupied in retraversing those parts of the route where the two trails were identical—namely, the Kukenaam valley, the ascent from the Kotinga ford to "Landmark Peak," and the line from Rera to Mataruka. There is, therefore, little to choose between the two routes. Both mean five stages of rather more than six hours' march a day. Schoolmaster's line was slightly more direct, but Joseph's was appreciably less arduous.

We reached Georgetown, after forty-six days' absence, on the 3rd February, 1916, resting on the way back for one day at Mataruka, one day on the Karto tableland, and one day at Kaietuk. There was a new and lovely note of colour on the Potaro; for the river was lit up by a beautiful pink blossom (Syphonia globifera) all along the banks, very much like peach-blossom in appearance and in its manner of growing on a leafless tree. Also there was much more water going over Kaietuk than when we passed upstream; and magnificent was the amber swirl that descended, to change into gleaming spray, flashing like diamonds, as it fell into the black depths. Grey-green cascades dashed down the crags on all sides, flashing out of the mists that lay heavy on the summits, to

mingle with the blossom-strewn river—a country for Undine indeed!

So our brief journey in the mountains ended, alas! below sea-level; nor did we "find wings waiting there," for the aeronautical service of the British Guiana Government is as yet only an aspiration.



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Horizontal Scale 1/2,000,000. Vertical Scale exaggerated 50 times.

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